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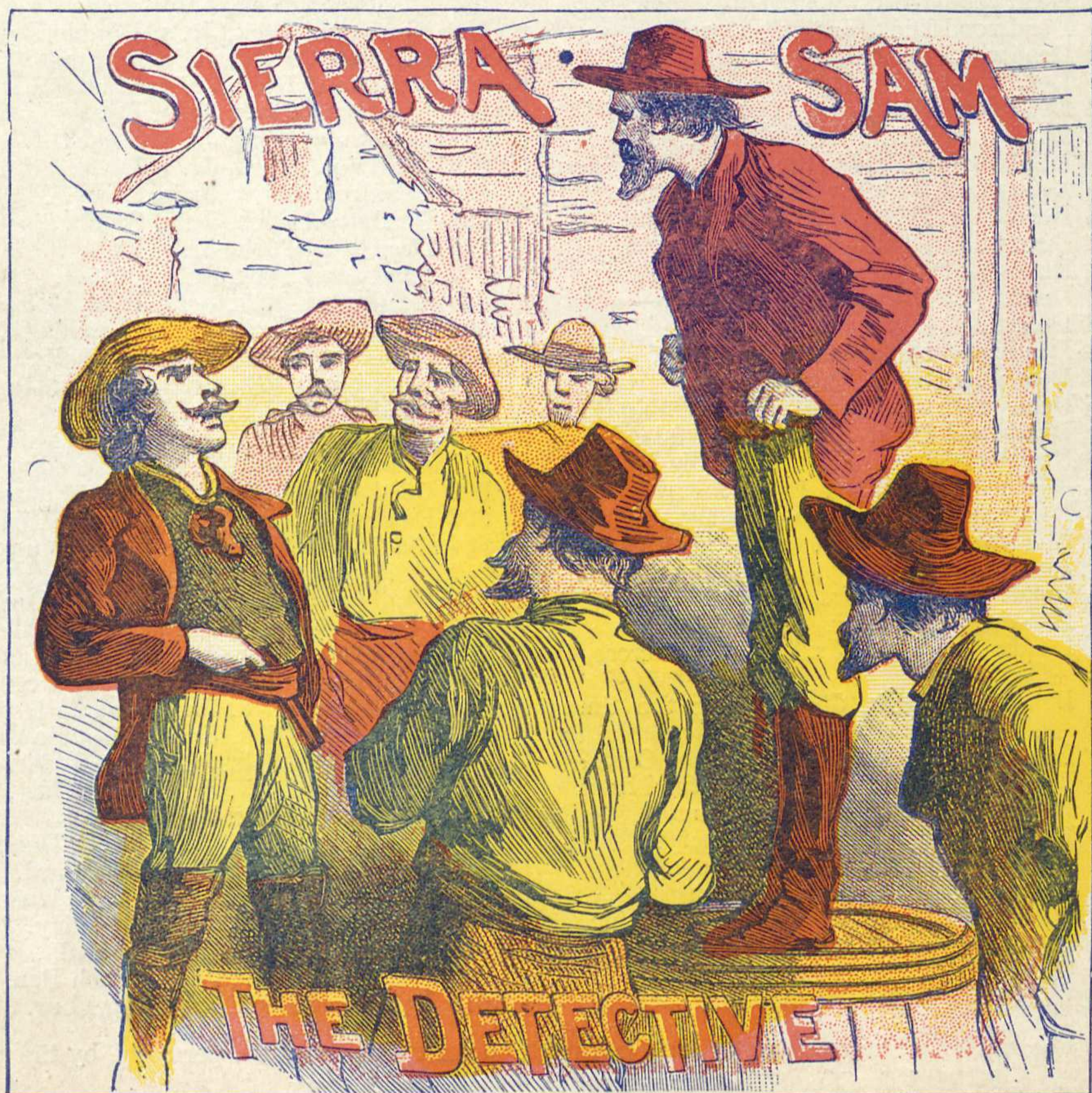
No. 49.

Issued Weekly.
Feb. 14, 1900.

M. J. IVERS & CO., Publishers,
(James Sullivan, Proprietor.)
379 Pearl Street, New York.

Price 5 Cents.
\$2.50 a Year.

Vol. IV.



EDWARD L. WHEELER'S DEADWOOD DICK, JR., NOVELS

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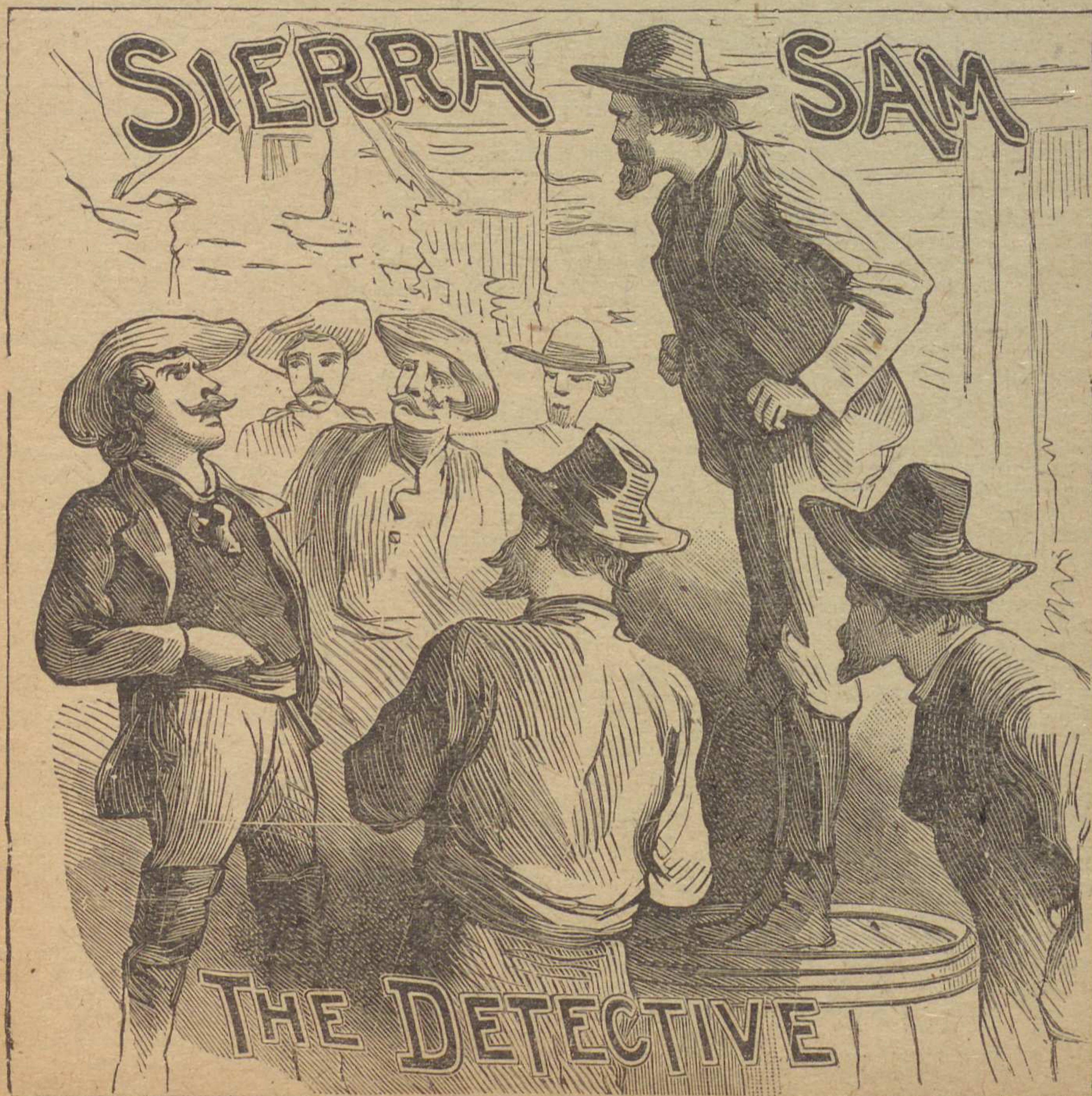
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Vol. V.



"SIR SPEAKER," HE SAID, ADDRESSING THE FELLOW UPON THE BARREL, "AM I TO INFER FROM THE WORDS I HAVE JUST OVERHEARD, THAT YOU CONTEMPLATE ARRESTING ME, SIERRA SAM?"

Sierra Sam, the Detective.

A TALE OF FAIRY FLATS.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DICK DREW, THE MINER'S SON,"

"THE MINER SPORT," "DEADWOOD DICK,"

"THE FRONTIER DETECTIVE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORM RIDER'S PLEDGE.

THE 10th of June.

Such a tenth day and evening of that usually balmy month, as had not been seen in many a season.

Into the rugged labyrinths of the mountains and foothills, and over the level plains blew a storm of but little less fury than a tornado, bringing with it a shower of rain, sticks, and often stones; it howled with dismal warning through the spectral mountain pines, and whirled through the rock-walled ravines and gulches with spiteful shrieks.

A man riding through a deep dark gulch, mounted upon a powerful horse, finally drew rein, with a grim shake of the head.

The stones and sticks were pelting his back with too much force to be pleasant.

"Don't like it, do you, Jerkins?" he said patting his animal on the neck. "I don't see how we are to better ourselves, though, as the gulch don't appear to offer any shelter. Guess we shall have to jog along and submit to the pelting with grinning grace."

So he gave the horse the rein again, and they dashed on with the storm, which tore and howled around and above them like an army of wind demons broken loose.

This storm rider was a personage of strikingly athletic and graceful form, which was clothed for the most part in citizen's garb, excepting the top-boots, wolf-skin cloak and sombrero.

His face, hidden in under a black crape mask, could not be seen, but his hair was long and luxuriant, and his whole appearance, aside from his face, was commanding and graceful.

He carried no rifle, and his only weapons appeared to consist of a pair of serviceable revolvers in his belt.

On—on—on, fairly swept away by the fury of the gale, went the horse and rider, until suddenly he heard a strange cry which he knew was not made by the storm—the piercing scream of a human being, and Jerkins at once halted, as if comprehending his master's wishes, while, almost at the same moment the rider espied the author of the scream, and uttered a cry of astonishment as he slid from the saddle.

It was a little girl, plainly dressed, and not over seven years of age, who stood close to where Jerkins had halted—a pretty little creature at a glance, whose long wealth of brown hair the furious gale tossed into wild confusion, and indeed she had to cling to a jutting rock on the canyon wall to prevent being blown away herself.

With curiosity the masked storm rider stepped nearer to her and peered into her face.

"What is it, little one—did you call?" he

asked, kindly. "What are you doing out in this storm?"

"Oh! sir, please!" she replied, tearfully; "papa sent me to find him help. Oh! sir, won't you help poor papa?"

"To be sure, my little one!" the masked man replied, at the same time wondering if this artless little thing would prove to be a decoy. "Where is your papa, child, and what is the matter with him?"

"Papa is sick at McGurdy's, and they won't let him go. He says they are murdering him. Papa is White Eagle, sir!"

"White Eagle!"

The masked man started, for the name was not new to him.

Indeed, White Eagle, the Handsome Half-breed, was well known through the whole Territory and well spoken of.

Although descended from one of the most powerful Sioux tribes, he was in a better sense a white man, possessed of education, intellect and honor, and was reputed to own a secret mine of exhaustless wealth, known alone to himself.

Literally a roaming hermit, he never associated much with either the red or the white race, by both of whom he was in a measure feared, from the fact that he hated evil-doers, and never hesitated to wreak vengeance upon them.

White Eagle sick and at McGurdy's Ranch?

The masked stranger felt sure that the fact did not augur well for the Handsome Half-breed; for the McGurdys had a bad repute, and mountain rangers, as a rule, avoided their place as they would a rattlesnake den.

Raising the child in his arms, the stranger said:

"Well, little one, come along, and we will go and see White Eagle. Which way shall we go?"

The child pointed down the gulch with a sob, and whistling for his horse to follow, the stranger strode away, his steps showing no trace of fear or hesitation.

Inside of ten minutes he came to a rude rambling cabin, built at one side of the gulch, from a single window of which gleamed a dim light.

Without pausing for the ceremony of knocking, he opened the creaking door and entered, closing it after, and putting his back against it, while his piercing gaze swept the scene within the habitation.

The room in which he found himself was furnished simply with a few stools, a rude bed, a table set with broken dishes, and a cupboard, while a fire burned in the fire-place.

Near the fire-place sat a brutal-looking individual, with bleared eyes, a straggling, unkempt beard and a red nose—a man whose dirty garb and general uncouth appearance was anything but prepossessing. His belt bristled with weapons.

A slouchily-dressed, vinegar-faced woman, with a fiery complexion, flaming eyes and fang-like teeth, was engaged in arranging the table, and a young woman, of perhaps twenty, who was better dressed, and not uncomely of face and form, was lying upon the bed, engaged in reading a book—but sat up immediately upon the stranger's entrance.

All the occupants of the cabin looked up with scowls as the stranger entered with the child in his arms—old McGurdy leaping to his feet with an oath.

"What d'ye want here?" he demanded, fiercely.

"I found this child of White Eagle, back here a piece. I want to see White Eagle himself."

"Ye can't see him!"

"Why not, pray?"

"Because ye can't. He's very sick, and we've orders to let no one see him."

"Who gave the orders?"

"The doctor, there!"

The stranger turned his burning gaze upon the young woman, whom McGurdy had intimated was "the doctor."

Her eyes dropped; a hard, white expression gathered about her thin little mouth.

"A female physician, eh?" the stranger commented. "May I inquire, ma'am, what authority you have for forbidding any one from visiting White Eagle?"

"The authority of the law, in not allowing a terrible disease to spread any further than this cabin!" was the cold reply. "If you don't want to die of virulent smallpox, you had best leave this cabin, sir!"

"Oh! I've not the least fear of that disease, having been among it several times heretofore," evident sarcasm in the tone. "I came here to see White Eagle, and am going to see him. If any attempt is made to hinder me, or do me injury, there's enough men near at hand to make mince-meat of you members of this disreputable den, even should I not pass in your checks. So take warning!"

The stranger strode across the floor fearlessly, and entered an adjoining room, closing and locking the door behind him.

The room was small, and contained only a bed and stand, upon which was a lighted candle and a vial of medicine.

Placing the child upon a chair, the storm rider turned to the man upon the bed.

Well deserving the name of the Handsome Half-breed was the man, for he was of striking appearance, both in face and form, with nothing but a dusky tinge of countenance to denote that Indian blood coursed through his veins.

His features were regular and of Anglo-Saxon cast; his eyes were dark and burned with a bright intelligence; his hair, dark and wavy, reached to his shoulders.

His eyes lit up gladly, as he saw the masked stranger standing by his bedside, and he put forth his hand in greeting.

"You are a welcome vision, stranger!" he said, speaking with an effort. "Yours is the first friendly presence I have felt, in my two weeks' confinement, here. Did my little Robin find you?"

"She did, or rather, I found her, and came, at her request. Why are you here, White Eagle, in this cut-throat den?"

"I was wounded, and desperate, and to elude my enemies, took my chances of shelter, here. It has proven worse than I anticipated."

"Are you badly wounded?"

"I was not, but McGurdy brought the woman attendant, and she has been poisoning me

to death, ever since. But for a powerful constitution, I should be dead now."

"Humph! are you sure?"

"Ay, I am sure. I just awoke from a two-days' lethargy, and as she has, with the McGurdys' aid, just given me another dose, it will not be long ere I go into another, which will no doubt use me up. Before it happens, I want you to hear my story."

The stranger nodded and sat down close at the bedside.

"That child," White Eagle said, in a low tone, "is mine own, and shall inherit all I have. Her mother is to-day the petted child of fashion, and one of the prominent belles of Washington."

The listener coughed his surprise.

"It is true. A few years ago David Carlyle and daughter visited the mines at Big Vista on a pleasure tour. The girl met me and professed great admiration for me; she had probably heard of my immense secret wealth. It was while at Big Vista that Carlyle fell in with some sharps, and got fleeced out of every cent he had, including fifty thousand dollars of Government money he had in his keeping. He at the time held some office in the Government at Washington—I forget just what. Of course he was in a bad fix, and came to me and asked a loan. I then made known to him the existing state of feelings between myself and his daughter, Miss Clio. And I agreed that if he would give me his daughter in marriage I would loan him the desired amount, taking a mortgage upon his real estate in Washington. An agreement was made, and Clio Carlyle was quietly made my wife—but surely, mind you; too surely, for I soon found that she had no love for me when I refused to give up the secret of my wealth, and looked down on me with supercilious contempt. It was too late then to repair matters, and I was heartily glad when one day she and her father suddenly left for Washington.

"That was seven years ago, after we had been married less than six months. A year ago I accidentally got a report that a child had been born to my wife after her return and residence in Washington a few months. So I immediately wrote her, inquiring into the matter, but got no answer.

"Not satisfied, I made a trip to Washington, and paid her a visit, but she refused to acknowledge such a birth. Inquiries revealed nothing, and I was warned to leave the capital under penalty of arrest—what for, I don't know. I did leave, but before doing so I paid her a midnight surprise, and choked out of her the confession that a child had been born, which was yet alive and in a foundling asylum, while she was engaged to be married to a rich New Yorker named Bayard Lynn.

"I then left her, stole my child from the asylum, and fled back to the West, only to be pursued by instruments of the Carlyles, whose mission it is to do away with the child and the proofs of the marriage and birth—all of which, thank God, I have. Here they are—all—everything pertaining to me and to my secrets in life," and from under the quilt he brought forth a box about eight inches long, which to all appearances was a solid brick of iron, as the stranger could see no lid, lock or way of opening it.

"The secret of getting into that box this child alone knows," White Eagle went on. "I am dying and must leave her behind to fight against those who would exterminate her. Will you take her, stranger, and her box, and help her fight her battles through? It is my last request on earth, for I need no one to tell me that I will soon leave this earthly scene for an eternity, I trust, of peace. Take the child as your own, assert her rights to the last, and, above all, never give her box up to any one, for therein lies all that can ever establish her identity and rights."

The masked stranger took the box, slipped it into his haversack, and then took White Eagle's hand within his own warmly.

"It shall be as you wish," he said. "To-night I will take your child and go to a place of safety. To-morrow I will send some one to remove you to a place where you can die in peace, if die you must. As to the child, I will stand by her, through thick and thin, and establish her rights, as sure as my name is—"

"What?" White Eagle asked.

The masked man whispered it in the half-breed's ear; then, turning, he brought the child to White Eagle, and allowed him to kiss her.

Soon after he raised the child in his arms and left the room.

None of the former occupants of the next room were there, but the outside door stood wide open.

"A trap, in front of that door!" the masked man smiled cunningly. "They're in the cellar, waiting for me."

Instead of passing out through the door he raised a window, and stepped out into the wild night, with a defiant laugh.

In a moment more he was in his saddle, with his *protegee* nestled in his arms, and was dashing down the gulch as fast as fleet-footed Jerkins could carry him.

CHAPTER II.

A WOULD-BE SUICIDE, AND THE FLAT MYSTERY.

"BOBTAIL bufflers, an' raphisodical, ragin' red-skins! thet won't do, me durned fool of a ducklet, so I'll jest prewent yer slippin' off this ann'inted yearthly coil, by insertin' my vote right hyar!"

And the eyes that ran along the barrel of the rifle flashed almost as brightly as did the weapon which he discharged an instant later.

Then, rising, the old man slung his rifle to his back, and hobbled rapidly forward to where a young man had fallen, in the moonlight, at the verge of a rift which broke through the plain of the prairie.

His arm had been pierced by the grim man's bullet; a revolver lay near where he had fallen.

"Young, 'an'some, an' purty as a posey, or my name ain't Old Tree-Toad!" the scout soliloquized, surveying the young man. "I say, young feller, ye war jest a-goin' to blow yer brains out wi' thet revolver, warn't ye?"

"Yes, I reckon so," was the growling reply, "and I don't thank you for interfering."

"Oh, yer don't, eh?" in disgust. "So ye wanted ter die, sure?"

"Of course I did. Just hand me that pistol, and let me finish my miserable career at once."

"Pshaw! you've got ther blues wuss nor my old mule, Cryptogram, used ter have 'em, an' thet war useless. Now, looker hyar, young feller: what's ther matter ails ye? Got ther dyspepsy, ther melancholics, or which?"

"It matters not, so long as I do not care to live longer," the would-be suicide replied, gloomily—a really handsome young fellow of two or three and twenty, well dressed, well formed, and possessed of really refined features, with dark eyes, a graceful mustache of the same hue, and hair to match.

"I am tired of living, disappointed in life's fondest hope, and I'd rather end my miserable existence now than prolong the torture further."

"Bad! bad!" Tree-Toad observed, with all the solemnity possible. "What's bin ther rip, pard? Has yer Sunday-best sweetheart given ye ther partin' grip, or hev ye run yer fut inter a hornets' nest?"

"The only woman I ever cared for cruelly discarded me, after drawing me on until I became in truth her slave!" was the sour response.

"Jerusalem! ye don't want'er go an' kill yerself, an' make yerself a laffin'-stock, jess fer a she woman! I once hed a tech o' ther disease myself, an' got left, but 'stead o' growin' soft an' sentrymental, I jest raised ther desateful critter's skulp an' went off rejoicin'. Thar's more'n one fish in ther sea; thar's my 'dopted darter, Keno Kate, fer instance—you bet yer burdocks she's a screamer, an' ef she see'd you hyar a-mopin', she'd jest bu'st her pistol-belt a-laffin'. But she's true as steel, Kate is, you bet! an' hes got more sense in her curly head than half yer city gals put together. Ye jest orter see Kate. What's yer name?"

"George Gerald!" the young man answered. "If you've got a rag, I wish you'd bandage up my arm which you've hurt."

"Sart'in! Jest you git up an' trot along with me tew camp, an' my Kate will fix ye up."

Gerald followed Old Tree-Toad across the prairie for half a mile, when they came to a cabin situated in a deep *arroyo* which communicated with the canyon or gulch, near the verge of which Gerald had attempted suicide.

Old Tree-Toad led the way into the cabin and gave the stranger a seat.

A young girl, some seventeen years of age, was seated near the fire-place engaged in sewing—a *petite* but gracefully-formed person, with a fair face, hazel eyes, a firm but pleasant mouth, and hair long and wavy.

She was attired in a plain but neat dress, wore a gay bow at her throat—looked decidedly pretty.

"Thar! that's Kate!" Old Tree-Toad announced, indicating the girl. "Kate heer's a love-sick chap whom I cotched in the act of committin' susanside, an' had ter wing him ter stop him. Bustle around, now, an' fix up his arm, an' see ef ye can't get up a reaction so he won't kerlapse wi' melancholics."

Late laughed lightly, and procuring some strips of cloth, soon had Gerald's wrist in a sling, and carefully dressed with a healing liniment.

It was not a bad wound, and he was likely to have the use of his hand again in a few days.

And it so happened that Gerald found himself comfortably installed for the night, and be-

came more than ordinarily interested in the uncouth trapper and his pretty ward.

What was the astonishment of the latter, then, when upon arising the next morning they made the discovery that some time during the night Mr. George Gerald had very quietly taken his departure without leaving a clew behind to tell whither he had gone!

"Ef he's bound to shute hisself over one woman, why let him shute—that's all," Old Tree-Toad concluded, very sententiously.

Every dog has his day—so does every gold-mining excitement have its day, and the day had fairly dawned over Fairy Flats.

One morning two ragged prospectors, nearly dead with exposure, fatigue and hunger, had struggled out from the labyrinths of the mountains upon the table-land or flats, through which coursed the sluggish, peeper-inhabited waters of McGee's Creek; and, to drive off a flock of buzzards that had followed them with hungry perseverance for a week, one of the men picked up a stone to hurl at them.

But his companion checked him, saying excitedly as he grasped the upraised hand:

"Stop, Bill—that's a nugget by all that's wonderful!"

And so it was—a nugget as large as a goose's egg.

Investigation followed, and the discovery made that the flats were one literal bed of placer-gold.

Wild were the discoverers. It was too rich a secret to keep, and after digging out a fortune in a few days, they struck for the nearest bounds of civilization to have a "good old-fashioned miner's drunk."

What was the result?

They had their drunk, spent their "bottom bit," and in the bargain gave away the secret of their "find."

In less than forty-eight hours afterward, the news of the new gold-field had reached a dozen towns, and a general stampede was made.

Fairy Flats was reached—the discovered gold drove the people mad, as it were, and a slab-and-cabin city went up in no time.

Claims were staked out, and fights had over the matter, in which the best man invariably raked in his choice at his adversary's expense; all the usual complement of saloons, gambling-dens, dance-houses and saloons quickly sprung into existence, and Fairy Flats was a new Dead-wood in less than three months.

But Fairy Flats possessed an advantage that not every golden camp could boast—a mystery!

And it was a mystery, too, which every one canvassed, but no one could explain.

And this it was:

The two prospectors had left the flats about the first of May; about the first of June, the initial train of settlers had reached the spot, to begin the building up of the new city. At the time the two discoverers had quitted the flats, there was no building of any sort there—not even a shanty or log lodge. On the arrival of the first wagon-train, a stone occupied the center of the flats—an artificial structure, evidently.

It had been placed there, consequently, in the time intervening between the departure of the two prospectors and the arrival of the train.

It was, apparently, one solid rock, about twenty feet long, fifteen feet wide, and ten feet high, and rested upon the ground.

Nowhere that human eye could discover, was there a crack or crevice to indicate that it was hollow, or that it had a secret entrance to the interior. It was as solid a rock as could be found in the mountains, and weighed many tons; but how came it there?

This was a mystery to every one, as was the companion query: What was it placed there for?

Upon one side of the strange rock were chiseled by a deft hand the following inscriptions, which were the only things throwing light upon the mystery.

The first inscription read:

"DEATH!"

"Within this castle dark and drear
There dwells a thing all men must fear.
Its tread on earth leaves bloody print,
Its heart is harder than the flint.
Beware! who mocks this sacred rock,
For he shall feel the avenger's shock.
The secret's known to but one man;
Go worship ye Sierra Sam."

In another place was inscribed:

"Woe be to him whose dastard wanton hand,
Shall seek this rocky tomb to hurt;
The Bloody Boots beside his corse shall stand,
Nor earthly power his doom avert.
Hark! list in the drear dead hours o' night;
Ye disbelievers then shall quake wi' fright."

This was all, and yet too much for that superstitious, wayward crowd, and despite a curious desire to examine the Death-rock, it was left unmolested, and so the mystery remained a mystery.

Bold men there were among the new-comers to Fairy Flats—men who had faced death in a dozen ways, and literally laughed it out of countenance; until one night came a stranger on the evening stage, and heard the strange story.

A gambler he was, with a pocketful of bad notoriety—a man who had blown down from Slab City, to "do for" the citizens of the new mountain Mecca.

Idaho was the somewhat characteristic name of the gent who wore revolvers in the long legs of his top-boots; whose by no means homely face was as dusky as a Spaniard's, and whose head was a mass of black curls, with a mustache, also curly, surmounting his thin upper lip.

He dressed in elaborate garments, wore costly jewelry, and sported a feather in his slouch silk felt hat.

Idaho at once became the observed of many observers. Dashing and "cheeky" was he; but while willing to play any man for stakes, he was of a rather taciturn and distant nature, and not easy to get acquainted with.

He at once rented a vacant card-table in the Miner's Rest, the principal gaming "palace" of Fairy Flats, and caught on to a card-loving crowd.

After fleecing a half-dozen miners out of their last dollar, he prepared to adjourn for the evening, but just then there entered the room a little girl of not more than twelve years, who strode

up to the gambler's table with an importance beyond her years.

She was rather shabbily dressed, had a pleasant, independent face, which might have been pretty but for the dirt, black eyes, dark hair, worn short and frowsy, and a miner's slouch sombrero, several sizes too large for her, on her head.

She sauntered up to the table, whistling merrily, her hands in her pockets, and her eyes surveying Idaho intently.

Both the gambler and the crowd gazed at her in surprise; she was evidently a new character in the town.

"Hello, Johnny!" she saluted, with a grin. "Bank bu'sted?"

"Oh! hardly," Idaho replied, laconically.

"Where did you sprout from, child?"

"Child?" the girl echoed; then she broke out into a peal of laughter. "Well, now, that's good! Mebbe you're right, too. I ain't big pumpkins fer age, but my head-gear's famuss. D'ye want to lose a V?"

"Go away! I'll not play with you!" Idaho growled. "If I catch you around here again I'll pull your ears."

"Bet ye!" the forward miss cried, getting wrathful. "I'm Little Luck, the Fairy of the Flats, I am, and you've got to play with me, same's ye do wi' other chaps."

It was a strange situation.

Idaho scowled—the crowd grinned.

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE LUCK AND NO LUCK.

WHILE the situation looked most ridiculously like a farce, the girl appeared as gritty and earnest as though she were ten years older than she was.

"Why, curse me for a cur if you haven't had Christian bringing up!" Idaho cried, angrily.

"Never mind about that," replied the girl.

"I waltzed inter hyer to play a game when ye begun playin' yer chin-music ag'in' me. As a result, you've jest got ter play a game wi' me, or else I'll know the reason why. Stand by me, gents?"

A grunt of approval went up from the crowd—several of whom had been bitten in playing with the gambler.

Idaho gave a sweeping glance about him, into the strange unsympathizing faces, and saw that he was undeniably in for it.

"Well, play it is then," said the gambler. "Lay down any amount you like, and I'll guarantee to cover it." It was evident he contemplated a punishment of the audacious player.

But, judge his surprise, when he saw the child take a large roll of bills from her pocket, in addition to a handful of gold pieces, and count out two thousand dollars!

"Thar, Johnny, cover thet, or weaken," Little Luck cried. "Mebbe ye haven't so big a pile?"

"I can just accommodate you and that's all," Idaho replied, counting out his money. "If I lose, I won't have enough to buy a lodging with."

The cards were shuffled, cut, and dealt. The game was to be poker.

The crowd gathered closer around the table with breathless interest, several new-comers being added to the number.

A stranger pushed through the crowd, close to the table, and stood watching the game, rather impatiently—a man dressed in citizen's clothing, slouch hat and top-boots—of handsome figure, evidently of great muscular power.

His eyes were sharp and piercing in their glance; his mouth wore rather a pleasantly firm expression and was shaded by a graceful mustache, the ends of which were cut straight across his cheek; his hair was worn long, down over his shoulders, after the fashion of the western scout.

Altogether he was an attractive and dashing appearing personage.

Idaho looked up as the stranger pushed forward, and surveyed him an instant, searchingly; then turned his attention once more upon the game, an evil resolve gleaming from his eyes.

One—two—three—four—down went the cards; out went the gambler's hand to rake in the stake, but the stranger was too quick for him, and seized his hand in a vise-like gripe.

"Stop!" he said, quietly, yet sternly. "I saw the cheat—so did the child. You were foolish to think you could play that game *here*!"

Idaho uttered a baffled curse, but could not jerk his hand away, and Little Luck raked in the stakes, and took advantage of the confusion to slip out of the room.

"The deuce take you! What do you mean?" Idaho raved. "Release my hand."

"Certainly! Look out, though, that you don't use it to a disadvantage to yourself. I'm heeled."

The threat was significant.

Idaho knew it, and needed no better assurance that he had encountered a man of more than ordinary character.

"I'm not rash!" he said, with a very malignant sort of a smile. "I'll arrange a settlement of this affair later."

"No time like the present, if you feel the least revengeful. Always strike when the iron is hot," was the composed answer. "I caught you in the contemptible act of cheating a baby—I stopped you. What's to follow?"

"Apology, or death!" Idaho replied. "I shall send you the terms later. In the mean time, who am I to suppose you are?"

"I am generally known as Sierra Sam!" was the reply. "I may have half-a-dozen other names, but what they are, does not concern you, or any one else."

Then, without deigning the gambler another glance, the mountain ferret turned away to the bar, and lit a cigar.

It was an unlucky hour that he uttered his name within the hearing of a resident of Fairy Flats.

But he didn't happen to know this at that particular time.

He purchased a cigar of the pretty bar-maid, conversed with her a few moments, and then quitted the saloon.

But he did not go alone.

Once outside the Miner's Rest, a dark shadow

followed swiftly and silently after him, keeping him just in sight—followed him like some fiend of the night.

Among the other professions represented in the rising metropolis, Fairy Flats, was that of a lawyer.

Although active law was literally a dead-letter in the town, there were occasionally little jobs of claim-deeds and other documents to draw up, and Moses Isaacs being first in the field, was consequently the first to hang out his shingle.

He was fifty years old, and unmarried; had a fiery hook-nose; bristling mustache, and a bald spot upon his roof; and was not notorious for strict honesty.

After leaving the Miner's Rest the man, Sierra Sam, betook himself to the Jew's shanty office, and found that individual at home.

When he entered Isaacs's office, the Californian wore a mask over the upper part of his face, and as a natural consequence the Jew leaped to his feet from a table where he was seated engaged in punishing a bottle of Burgundy, and reached for a rusty old shot-gun which occupied one corner of the room.

"Oh, you needn't bother about the pop, Jewsharp," Sam warned, coolly closing the office door behind him. "I came on business."

"Vot der tuyfel pizness you vant?" Isaacs demanded, still retaining his grasp upon the shot-gun. "Vy you come like von t'ief off der night?"

"Oh, well, as to the mask," Sam said, seating himself composedly, and elevating his feet upon a table—"as to the mask, I just put that on so as if anybody dropped in during my interview I wouldn't be recognized. Be seated."

Isaacs dropped into his chair.

"I came in to see if you have had any foreign visitors this evening—that is to say, clients from out of town?" asked Sam.

Isaacs elevated his eyebrows.

"You are a detective, vas?" he interrogated. "Vot ish your name?"

"Sierra Sam, if that suits you," the Californian returned. "You may possibly have heard of me."

Judging by the start the Jew made, he had.

"Vot you vant?" he demanded, evading Sam's interrogative.

"I came to find out something, and I've found it out."

"You haff? Der tuyfel you say!"

"Yes; you needn't tell me I had a visitor to-night; I know it already."

Isaacs rubbed the end of his red nose thoughtfully, and looked hard at Sierra Sam through his glasses.

"Vell?"

"You were visited by Mr. David Carlyle to-night, who, according to my calculations, must have arrived in Fairy Flats some time yesterday."

To this Isaacs made no denial or assent; he simply eyed his visitor expectantly.

"Carlyle, I presume, was accompanied by his daughter," Sam went on, in his imperturbable way. "Of course they enlisted you as their lawyer in an important case, you being the only lawyer in town."

Still no answer from the Jew.

"You are a shrewd fellow," Sam asserted, looking him over from head to foot; "you have brains enough to establish a theological college, and gall enough to stock a regiment of lightning-rod agents or impecunious actors. But to be successful, there are still two things you lack."

"Vot ish dot?" Isaacs grunted, hardly knowing whether to feel flattered or not.

"Firstly, *method*," Sam assumed; "secondly, a partner. You want a partner with whom to share the secrets of your business, and with whom to plan."

"Vel, maybe you know more apoud my pizness den vot I do!" Isaacs retorted, quite taken aback by the Californian's assurance.

"Exactly! I know just what you want. I'll give you a thousand dollars for half-interest in your business, you to work with me (silently, of course) in everything!"

"Nixy! I don'd vas vant no partners—no t'ousand dollars—noddinks to do mit you, Misder Sierra Sam. I vas an honest man—I keeps my own secrets; I find oud yours. Dot settles dot! Der door vas ready, yonder—you vas know how to turn der knob!"

Sierra Sam gave vent to a whistle.

"Well, if you cannot make terms, I'll bid you good-evening," he said, and forthwith took his departure.

"To be shut up in this jack-knife shape is bad," he confessed to himself, when once outside. "The Jew is firmly bought up with money."

He wandered through the lively mining-camp, busied with his own thoughts, but also noticing the stirring scene about him; for night at Fairy Flats was a literal holiday.

Saloons and other business places kept open all night, and the streets were filled with people—or rather the street, for there was but one. Where the ever-moving populace ever got in their sleep was a mystery.

In front of the Miner's Rest a crowd was gathered around a man, who, mounted upon an empty flour barrel, was addressing them words which appeared greatly to interest them; so Sam paused a few yards off, to listen.

"Yas, gents, thar ain't no two ways o' the matter; ther chap's got to be arrested. He's a desprit cuss, I've hearn tell, an' ther fact that his name is engraven on ther Death-rock, shows that he's no natteral sort o' human, sich as we want in our city. Fu'st ye kno', thar'll be several corpses a-layin' around here, an' he'll be ther cause on it."

"But how's ther galoot ter be tuk?" one of the auditors demanded. "Ef he's such a gallus chap, he may show fight."

"Easy enough. Goff, heer, tells me he's tuk possession o' Manning's vacant shanty, 'thout leave or license, an' we'll jest drap around there, when the moon gits low, and surround the shanty. Then he'll have to surrender!"

Sierra Sam gave a start, as he heard the cabin mentioned, for he knew it was the one he was temporarily occupying.

Resolved to know the truth of the matter, he stode forward, to a position facing the speaker.

All eyes were turned upon him to perceive

that his white hands rested conveniently handy to a pair of handsome revolvers in his belt.

"Sir Speaker," he said, addressing the fellow upon the barrel, "am I to infer from the words I have just overheard, that you contemplate arresting me, Sierra Sam?"

"Waal, I reckon that's about the size of it, stranger!" the orator replied.

"Perhaps, then, you can accommodate me with an explanation of the why and wherefore of such a proceeding?" Sam demanded, sternly. "I don't generally submit to arrest without some knowledge of why I am arrested."

"But there's exceptions in all cases!" a mocking voice cried behind them, and a man's arms were wrapped around him; then the crowd sprung forward to secure the advantage thus gained over the mountain sleuth.

CHAPTER IV.

SIERRA SAM SEES STARS.

BUT they found that they had tackled a bigger job than they had at first imagined, for with an almost superhuman effort Sierra Sam broke loose from the man who had seized him from behind, and, wheeling, dealt the fellow a stunning blow between the eyes that dropped him summarily.

The man was Idaho, the gambler.

Turning once more, Sierra Sam attempted to draw his revolvers, but the crowd now dropped upon him from either side, and nothing was left for him but surrender.

So he submitted to have his hands bound behind his back, and was marched off to the town lock-up, or strong cabin, which had been built with a view of holding captured criminals.

After being locked up Sierra Sam threw himself upon a bed of grass which was in one corner, and lay for some time in deep thought.

"It's an unlucky thing that I ever set myself down in this burg," he muttered. "By some fatality they know me, and have some grudge against me. I wonder what it is—why I am arrested?"

It was a puzzle to him, and destined to remain so that night.

The next forenoon, after a loaf of bread and some water had been brought him by the guard, and he had breakfasted upon it, a visitor was admitted.

Sierra Sam surveyed his caller narrowly, but failed to recognize him. He was a man of some three-and-fifty years, rather portly of build and well dressed—with dark, keen eyes, a full, florid face and bushy gray hair and whiskers.

He in turn surveyed Sam, with a keen inquiring gaze.

"Good-morning," he accosted. "Sorry to see you in this shape, friend. How long have you been locked up?"

"Since last night, as you must be aware," Sam answered. "Who are you?"

"I am David Carlyle, of Washington," answered the man.

"Carlyle," Sam said, looking at the log floor of the jail, reflectively. "Carlyle? Seems to me I've heard the name, somewhere's before."

"Very likely you have," the Washington man said, with a laugh. "In fact, Mr. Sierra Sam, I believe we are quite well known to each other,

indirectly, and it is with that supposition that I have made you a call."

"Ahem! well?" interrogatively. Sam evidently did not seem inclined to urge on the conversation.

"Yes, we ought to know each other, since you have taken up sides against me and my daughter. Presumably you knew we were coming here to Fairy Flats?"

"I may have surmised such a thing."

"I also expected to find you here," Carlyle went on, "but supposed I should find you aggressive, rather than submissive."

"I don't know that you find me submissive, as you choose to term it," Sam retorted. "I don't know that I've acceded to your propositions, providing you have made any."

"Well, no; I simply spoke, with an eye to the future. You're in a bad fix here, with a fair prospect of getting your neck in a noose. I am the only person who is sufficiently interested in your welfare to interfere in your behalf, with the power to save you."

"Indeed! What interest can you have in me, whose business is to thwart you if I can?"

"Oh! well; perhaps you might call it a selfish interest. You know as well as I that the sealing of your tongue means much to me and mine."

"Perhaps, yes. But my tongue cannot be sealed except at my own will."

"But, this may not be long. If your certain sentence is not influenced in your favor, your tongue will very soon cease to wag."

"Well, in that case, I'll let it wag what is necessary, before I shuffle off, much to your disadvantage. You're playing a villainous game—a bold and rascally game. Have you the least idea that you are going to win?"

"Certainly I shall win! Otherwise I am a ruined man. My daughter has an opportunity to marry one of New York's moneyed aristocrats. For four years she has been forced to put off his earnest proposals, knowing well that she dare not marry. Years ago, she made a bad move by allying herself in marriage to a rich half-breed—of course you know about this. By the union, I was for a time helped out of a monetary embarrassment, and as my child could never like the savage, it was but a natural consequence that she should abandon him. This fatal marriage has hindered her from a dozen good matches—is it any wonder we seek for relief?"

"Considering that you contrived to inveigle a noble fellow into a scheme, with a view of getting possession of his wealth, I do not deem it any wonder that you should be guilty of any heinous crime!" Sierra Sam answered sternly.

"David Carlyle, I have no words to express my detestation for a man of your vile character. It is such detestable creatures as you, that I make a specialty of hunting down to the fate they deserve. For your daughter, I have even less respect; for a woman who would turn her own child into a foundlings' asylum, in order to screen its claim to her mothership, and who would afterward seek its destruction, in order that she might marry again—such a woman I could see subjected to the barbarous cruelties of the Indian torture stake, without raising a finger to help her."

Carlyle listened, his face assuming a grayish pallor, and his eyes averted, for he was aware that, severe though the censure, it was none the less just.

"Well, we all have our own opinions; it is scarcely worth while to discuss them. You know whether White Eagle or the child yet live; tell me that and I'll ask you no more!"

"I will tell you nothing that can in any way further your murderous schemes. Of course you know the child still lives—where, is a secret. It is also a secret whether White Eagle lives or not."

"So I am to understand that you do not care to secure your freedom."

"Not through you—no!" Sam responded, decisively.

"Then I shall have to use my influence against, instead of for, you."

"Do so. But look you that I do not get free. It might prove disastrous to you."

"Oh! I'll look to that—I'll look well to that, sir! Good-day, sir!"

If Mr. Carlyle was satisfied with the result of his interview, his face did not show it.

That afternoon Sierra Sam was taken into Fairy Flats's "court of justice," to be tried.

A large crowd was assembled within the place, and Sam was conducted to a reserved space fronting a dry-goods box, upon which Moses Isaacs sat, his legs dangling off, and a huge meerschaum pipe between his lips.

It was the queerest court-room scene the Californian had ever encountered, but after a deal of waiting they got down to business, Isaacs assuming a standing position upon the box.

"Ladies und shendlemens," he muttered rather than spoke out (and it was a noticeable fact that there were no ladies present), "der bresent occasion vas von uff dem occasions ven id pecoomes us as some beoples to rise mit der law on our side und brodest against der vickedness of mankind. Vonce more ve haff sot our eyes on von suspicious character, und prought him mit der court-house in to stand oop und be investigated. Vil somepody stood up und explain vot der brisoner am arrested for?"

The miner who had addressed the crowd the night before immediately arose.

"If you please, Mr. Judge of the Jury," he began, "I have to offer that the prisoner at the bar is a suspicious character. Every one knows of the Death-rock mystery—ther place, cause, or wherefore of which remains unexplained, and on the side of which is engraved in verse the threat of some unknown thing or creature. In that verse we are advised that Sierra Sam is the only one who can explain the mystery. The prisoner at ther bar comes waltzin' inter town, big as life, an' I allow he's elected ter pony up ther secret of the Death-rock or dance on a rope. Guess all ther boys aire wi' me in them sentiments."

A coarse murmur of assent from the majority of the audience signified that they were.

"Vel, Misder Sierra Sam, vot you haff to say apoud der matter?" Isaacs demanded. "Vat eggsplanation haff you got to offer concerning der pizness of der mysterious rock?"

"None at all," Sam replied. "I know nothing whatever of any such rock as you describe,

upon which you claim my name is inscribed. Will you permit me to see this rock?"

A consultation was held, and it was finally decided to humor the prisoner's request.

He was accordingly escorted to the strange rock under strong guard, and allowed to look it over and to read the inscriptions.

If any man was ever surprised, it was the Californian, and his whole demeanor showed it.

"Gentlemen," he said, after he had finished his inspection, "I'll allow you're not much to blame, for I'll be shot if I can explain or understand this matter any better than you can. You say this apparently solid rock was planted here within one month's time. How it came or how my name came upon its side, I swear to you I know nothing about. It's all a blank mystery to me, even as to you, and I'd give my right ear to be able to give you the solution. You may do as you please with me, but I am powerless to aid in unraveling the mystery."

But though earnest was the declaration, it did not satisfy the miners, and Sierra was taken back to the court-room.

Here he made the same statement.

"Dat don'd wash," Isaacs demurred. "I dinks you vas von pig rascal, und you haff come here to Fairy Flats to make troubles."

"Can I say a word here?" David Carlyle demanded, pushing forward.

"Yesh; you say anyt'ings you please," Isaacs assented.

"Then allow me to remark that I've seen this man, Sierra Sam, before. He is wanted in the East for innumerable murders, and all you've got to do is to send him back there and he will be hung in short order."

"Dot vas not necessary," Isaacs cried. "I sentence Sierra Sam to pe hung mit his neck till he vas dead, to-morrow morning at sunrise."

"David Carlyle," your infamous lie works well," Sam cried out, sternly.

Then he was led from the room down the street to the jail.

In the dead of the night that followed, when the street was pretty nearly deserted, most of the populace being within doors, a man, bare-headed and breathless, rushed into the Miner's Rest, exclaiming:

"For God's sake, gentlemen, come outside!"

A wondering crowd obeyed, and he pointed to a sight that caused them to shrink back.

Upon the white sandy ground in front of the saloon, lying upon his back, pale, and apparently dead, was Sierra Sam, who had been left in jail under strong guard.

This was not all. Upon the white sand, which the brilliant moonlight made as light as day, were bloody boot-tracks—a dozen distinct foot-prints, all told, the full shape of a boot being impressed there in a blood red color.

A dozen only; there they began; there they ended—leaving no trail to show how the dread owner had come, or departed!

CHAPTER V.

SAM TURNS A SOMERSET AND STRIKES A NEW MYSTERY.

HERE was another wystery for Fairy Flats, as sure as fate!

What did it mean?

How had Sam been rescued from the jail, so strongly under guard?

How had the bloody-booted visitor made his departure, without leaving a trail of his startling footprints behind him?

These were the leading questions propounded, as soon as the astounded crowd were able to comprehend what had transpired.

Some of the bolder spirits inaugurated an investigation, however, which resulted in two discoveries.

Sierra Sam was not dead, as he appeared, but drugged with chloroform, the smell of which still clung about him. On his breast was pinned a paper, upon which was written the following, in a bold dashing style of chirography:

"Beware! Observe the fate of those who would guard this man; the same or worse for all who henceforth shall seek the life of Sierra Sam. His life is charmed; I swear it shall not be harmed.

"BLOODY BOOTS."

If this was surprising to the citizens of Fairy Flats, and calculated to shake their nerves, the discovery that awaited them at the jail, was even more so.

Of the seven guards, who had been left to watch over the jail, but one was to be found, and he was seated in the open doorway, bound hand and foot and gagged!

All efforts to discover the whereabouts of his companions proved futile, and on being released, the man could not or would not explain one word of what had happened, but seemed overwhelmed with the greatest affright and terror.

He was taken back to the tavern, as was Sierra Sam, and efforts were at once made to restore the latter to consciousness, but it was fully half an hour ere he became sufficiently conscious to understand where he was.

Then he looked about and into the grim faces of the miners gathered about him, in great surprise.

"Well, what's the matter now, gentlemen?" he asked. "Am I so good-looking that you can't withstand the curiosity to stare at me?"

"Guess you're about ther snuggest enigma thet evyer struck Fairy Flats," a miner said—Tom Jarvis, by name. "Jest explain what's happened, will ye, afore we cut yer head off, kerslap! Thar ain't goin' ter be no foolin' about this matter no longer."

"Well, if you'll tell me what's happened, maybe I shall be better able to accommodate you," Sam replied.

An explanation was given him of all that was known relative to the matter, and he listened, his face expressing the great astonishment he felt.

"Gentlemen," he said, when he had heard all, "of course you all look upon me with suspicion, and I even regard myself with incredulity, for on my honor, I swear I do not know what it all means. I'm as innocent of any knowledge of all this seeming mystery as you are, and why my name should be coupled with it, surpasses my understanding!"

"Can't help what you say," the miner replied. "Something 's got ter be did, an' that ter one't. You're an agent of the devil, an' ye can't locate no claim here in Fairy Flats, ef I know myself."

Sam was left in the saloon, under guard of a dozen men while the remainder of the crowd passed out of doors.

Sam could hear them, and other exciting sounds on the outside, and knew they were holding a sort of pow-wow, over the question of what was to be done with him.

His hands and feet were bound, and twelve determined men stood facing him, with drawn revolvers.

Surely, there was no show for him to escape at present, anyhow; and he felt sure that the faster the minutes flew by, the nearer approached his doom.

Just behind him, as he sat with his back toward the wall, was an open window; but probably, the guards did not give the window a second thought, well knowing they could "salivate" the prisoner before he could stand a show of escape, in any direction.

The guards were chatting among themselves, and Sierra was straining his sense of hearing to catch the sounds from the outside, when suddenly to his ears came a cautious:

"Sh!"

He remained perfectly motionless, his heart beating wildly, for he believed that aid was near at hand.

Presently he heard the whisper again.

"Sh! Can you not make some excuse to stand up?"

Without replying, Sam instantly arose to his feet—at the risk, too, of being shot down, for the guards instantly leveled their weapons upon him.

"Never mind the pops, gents," he said, with a laugh. "I want to smoke, and reckon you won't kick if you do, too, just to pass away time. If one of you will reach down in my breeches pocket, you'll find a half-eagle, with which to treat the crowd, myself included."

The "invite" hit the miners in a tender spot; the money was secured, and one of the number made for the bar to make the purchase.

He soon returned, and gave Sam a lighted cigar, while he distributed the rest among his companions.

"Yes, there's nothing like a cigar, when a fellow's got a cool dozen revolvers staring him in the face, backed up by the prospect of inheriting one of Judge Lynch's patent neckties!" Sam remarked, backing up a few inches and seating himself upon the window-sill with the utmost apparent thoughtlessness. "I've heard it said that tobacco was the best cure in the world for a man with the blues, and I believe it. These cigars ain't the best article, are they—not genuine Havanas? No, you needn't mind returning me the change, pard; it will just about set 'em up fer the gang in the way of liquid refreshments, so trot it out. I may not get another bite o' bug-juice here below, providin' the folks elect to hang me."

If the guards had been on the eve of ordering the Californian out of the window, Sam's action disarmed them of all suspicion of an intent on his part to escape, and he was allowed to retain his position.

Marks, the man who had got the cigars, skurried off after the liquor, and soon returned with a salver containing thirteen glasses of "bug-juice."

"Reckon ye'll have to hold mine up to the fore of my organ of absorption," Sam said, "being as I haven't got the use of my flukes. Then, before we drink, I'll propose a toast."

A glass was taken by Marks and the eleven other men, and raised; Marks also holding one up to Sierra Sam's lips.

"Well, gents," the Californian called out, "here's to a bit of a golden rule: the man who laughs first is the last man's fool. All together; drink hearty!"

Into twelve pairs of lips went the fiery liquid!

Out of the window, like a flash, keeled the man of the sierras!

A howl went up from the outwitted guards. They dashed the glasses to the floor; they leaped to the open window.

Sierra Sam was gone!

In five minutes the infant metropolis was fairly aroused, and a lively search was instituted for the Californian; but as Fairy Flats was encircled on every side by mountains and timber, as a matter of course, Sierra Sam was not discovered.

In the mean time, where was the mountain detective?

Of course his tumble from the window had been premeditated.

He struck the ground upon his feet, by turning a complete somerset, and found himself close beside a female figure, which was crouching close in to the side of the building, in the shadow.

"Sh!" she warned, as she quickly flashed a knife through the bonds confining his feet and arms, thrust a revolver into his hand, and pulled him around the near corner of the building.

All this was done in a second of time.

"It's nip and tuck whether we escape, now, or not!" the woman gasped. "Come! follow my every move!"

She led off, running across the Flats like a deer, and dodging here and there so as to keep a line or range of shanties between them and the Miner's Rest.

In five minutes they reached a shanty near the outskirts of the mining-camp, the door of which the woman unlocked, and they entered.

It was a fair-sized, cleanly-looking apartment that Sam found himself in; the furniture was rude, and limited in quantity, but arranged to show off to the best advantage.

A candle upon the table furnished a dim light.

The woman sunk breathlessly into a chair, the moment the door was closed and barred, and motioned Sierra Sam to do the same.

"I guess we've eluded them after all, though I did not hardly expect that we should!" she gasped, without raising her veil. "You worked your escape from the Rest admirably."

"But I shouldn't have thought of it had I not known by your warning that help was waiting on the outside," Sam declared. "I can hardly find words to express my gratitude to you for assisting in my escape."

"No gratitude is required. I knew you were innocent, or I should never have interested myself. You are not out of danger yet, nor will

you be until you are miles from this place, with your face turned eastward. Rewards will be offered for your apprehension, and if you remain in the vicinity you will run great risks of being retaken."

Sam laughed.

"Well, every man is liable to get taken in by an enemy," he said, "but I flatter myself that I am generally pretty wide-awake. And although I shall hereafter move about less promiscuously, very likely I shall still hover about Fairy Flats, until my mission is performed."

"May I inquire what that is?" the woman demanded, leaning her head forward. "I might be able to assist you!"

Sierra started. That voice, it seemed to him he had heard somewhere before—just where, he did not then recall.

"Possibly," he replied. "Presumably you know me, and that I make a business of hunting down rogues and rascals of all kinds."

"You are not exactly unknown to me, sir," the woman said, "but I have reasons for not wishing to disclose my identity to you. I am aware what brings you to Fairy Flats—and I am also aware what chances you stand of winning. You will be beaten at every turn, and be killed before you are two months older!"

"I am not so sure of that," Sam assured, dryly, "and since you know so much, you will excuse me if I demand to know who you are?"

He arose to his feet, a resolute expression upon his face.

She arose also, and shoved a cocked revolver toward him from under her shawl.

At this juncture in the tableau a rear door opened, and a childish figure bounded into the room.

"Oh, aunty! don't harm that gentleman! That is the man who protected me the other night!"

The child was none other than the strange waif—"Little Luck!"

CHAPTER VI.

TWO WOMEN'S WOOING.

SIERRA SAM looked at the child keenly, and then toward the veiled woman.

"I reckon you are about right, sis," he said. "This woman had better think twice before shooting at me!"

"I am not afraid to shoot if you make any attempt to discover my identity," the woman replied, calmly. "I am not afraid of you, Sierra Sam."

"That remains to be told," Sam returned. "I think I know you now. But as I must beg the hospitality of your shanty an hour or so, let us not quarrel. You have a smart child here, for her age."

"Too smart to be took in by oily-tongued sharpers!" the woman retorted, rather spitefully. "You had better have nothing to do with her."

"Oh, I shall not utilize her for the purpose of filling another's shoes," the Californian replied. "She is not the child I seek."

"You are not sure of that!"

"Yes, I am positive; that pert miss has no resemblance to and none of the characteristics of White Eagle's child. By the way, let us un-

derstand each other. It may as well be now as another time. You are the one the McGurdys employed to doctor White Eagle, when, through his child's solicitation, I paid the ranch a visit three years ago."

"Ah! that was *you*, then?"

"It was. I was at the time searching for Belle Swain, a noted fence and go-between for Raoul's road-agent band, up near Yuma. You may as well take off your veil, since I recognize you."

The woman obeyed.

She looked no older than three years before at McGurdy's shanty, except that there was a more hunted expression to her eyes, her mouth was firmer set, and she was possibly a trifle stouter of figure.

"Well, I suppose I am to look upon you as a foe?" she said, inquiringly.

"Very naturally," Sam replied, "although I must not forget that I owe my rescue partly to you. I found you poisoning White Eagle—I couldn't have much love or respect for a murderess, or the tool of other murderers."

"You wrong me."

"I do not. I examined the stuff you were giving the Handsome Half-breed—found it was aconite and destroyed it. And he—"

"Died, for all, of natural causes."

"How do you know that he died?"

"It matters not. I am not going to be made a claim for others to work and get rich from."

Sam resumed his seat and was silent for several minutes. The woman doctor did likewise.

"You were set on, in your attempt on White Eagle's life, by the Carlyles?" he remarked finally, more positively than interrogatively.

"I decline to answer. White Eagle still lives, in the opinion of some—others believe that he is dead. The secret lies in your possession."

"You are wrong. I have no knowledge as to whether the chief lives or not. That his child lives, however, I am almost certain, and I am the one that wants her."

"Probably. There are several in the field with a similar desire. But the child is not alone all that is sought for. There is a little iron box containing the secret of White Eagle's buried fortune. Where is it? It disappeared from the shanty of the McGurdys about the same time that you did."

"I'll give five thousand for the possession of it," Sam asserted. "I lost it with the child. Both were stolen from me one night in camp on mid-prairie when I was asleep."

"And you never got on track of the thieves?"

"Oh! that is a matter of my own. I expect to find the child and the box soon, and baffle you and the Carlyles."

"How do you know but what I am working in behalf of White Eagle's interests?"

"Bah! you are working for pecuniary gain—that's patent! You propose to put forward Little Luck, as she calls herself, but your scheme will never work."

"Why not?"

"Because there is but one living person who can ever inherit White Eagle's wealth while Sierra Sam lives. I'll fight a hundred scheming devils, before I'll see the rights of little Idyl Imbrie usurped. I guess the pursuit is about

over, and I'll take advantage of the lull to make my escape into the mountains."

"Hold on! Do not hurry! I have a proposition to make to you."

"Be brief, then! It must indeed be a strong argument that can induce me to be influenced by the voice of a murderess."

"Stop! I will not stand that! I am no murderess! White Eagle left the McGurdy shanty alive. That is all I know about it. My proposition is this: Marry me, Sierra Sam, to Clio Carlyle's betrothed, and establish Little Luck as White Eagle's child and heir, and I will, inside of ten days, place in your hands the secret of the hiding-place of the iron box containing the key to White Eagle's buried treasure."

Sierra Sam looked astonished.

"I should certainly do nothing of the kind," he replied. "If you have a match to make, make it yourself. Little Luck is *not* White Eagle's child, and she shall not inherit any wealth he may have left behind."

He turned as he spoke, and strode to the door; when he finished, he opened the door and left the shanty.

The "Doctor" followed him to the door.

"I am merciful, or I should yet give you up to those who seek you!" she cried out after him.

"I may, however, conclude to change my plans, and marry you instead of Clio Carlyle's choice. So, *au revoir*."

Sierra Sam did not reply, but hurried rapidly away out of the town.

The woman was an enigma to him; he knew he was destined to have trouble with her yet.

The "Doctor" had not spoken falsely when she said that rewards would be offered for the capture of Sierra Sam.

A grand pow-wow was held by the citizens, and sums voted, and, as a result, a reward of five hundred dollars was offered.

Several placards were fixed up and posted about the town, viz:

"\$500 REWARD!

"The above reward will be paid to the person or persons who captures the escaped outlaw answering to the name of Sierra Sam, and delivers him up to the custody of the citizens of Fairy Flats, alive.

"By order of THE COMMITTEE."

A Vigilance Committee was at once organized, and Idaho, the gambler, was made the chief.

He was a bold, reckless fellow of the devil-may-care type, and professed great prowess as a man-hunter "sharp," and very naturally, after his confirmation as chief of the Vigilantes, he set himself up as Fairy Flats' principal personage.

Idaho was a great villain, no doubt, but he was none the less a polished gentleman when he chose so to be, and formed female acquaintances with the ease and certainty of a natural born "masher."

It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that he had not been in the little mining metropolis a week before he had formed a very agreeable acquaintance with Miss Clio Carlyle.

This fact came to the notice of a very stately and austere-looking gentleman, Mr. Bayard Lynn by name, who, by the way, constituted

one of the Carlyle party stopping at the hotel, and so Mr. Lynn called the attention of David Carlyle to the fact in rather a remonstrating way.

"You see, it's rather decidedly unpleasant to me, who have been courting Miss Clio these several years, and following her wherever she went, awaiting for her to name our marriage-day," Lynn concluded.

"Pshaw! don't become jealous so soon, Lynn," the ex-government official answered, patting the New-Yorker upon the shoulder. "You know my girl worships the ground you walk on, and the only cause for her putting off the ceremony is her exceeding timidity and ill-health. But she has solemnly promised me that she will marry you before we leave Fairy Flats, which will be as soon as she feels a little stronger from contact with this bracing mountain air. As to this Idaho, he is merely a speaking acquaintance, and I'll see that Clio cuts him off from her list."

This appeased Lynn for the time being, but did not end the matter, as the elder Carlyle had promised. For that night, as he was coming up the street, he saw a sight that warmed his aristocratic blood to a boiling point—something unusual to his sluggish temperament.

A band was playing in front of the Cosmopolitan, and upon the veranda, or rather, balcony, overlooking the street, were Clio Carlyle and Idaho, leaning against the railing and chatting, while they watched the crowd below.

The sight of them, taking evident pleasure in each other's society was enough to drive most any lover into a fit of jealousy, for Clio Carlyle was certainly a great beauty.

She was possessed of a stately, willowy figure, of exquisite grace; her face and complexion were of rare beauty; her eyes were soft brown and lustrous; her mouth wore by habit a most winning expression; her luxuriant hair matched well with her complexion and eyes.

Rich and artistic attire and jewelry, too, added to her personal appearance, with more than ordinary effect.

Bayard Lynn uttered an exasperated ejaculation as he saw the dark-faced, oily-tongued gambler bending close toward Miss Carlyle, in familiar converse.

"Confound the infernal rascal," he gritted, seizing his serviceable walking-stick in a firmer grasp. "I'll teach him not to intrude upon my personal rights!"

He entered the hotel, rushed up the stairs, and out upon the balcony, like a madman.

Idaho was saying sentimental nothings to Miss Carlyle, when he received a stinging rap beside the head, was suddenly lifted and pitched over the railing, while Miss Carlyle found her wrist as suddenly in the vise-like grasp of Bayard Lynn.

"So you have concluded to intersperse my devotions to you with a gambler's sleek-tongued flattery, eh?" he ejaculated, fiercely.

She uttered a cry of pain, and tried to release herself, but his grasp was as obdurate as his face was stern.

"Oh! Barry! Barry!" she cried, "how can you be so rude! You know I care for no one but you!"

"It looks like it, I must admit, to see you acting the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet, moonlight, and even a brass band thrown in, free of charge."

She grew pale, as he released his hold, and threw herself in his arms.

"Oh! Barry! Barry! you are wrong—terribly wrong! That man was but a stranger to me; in fact, I have never spoken to him over half a dozen times. Oh! Barry, I do not care for him—for no one in this wide world but you."

"Then, why do you keep putting off our marriage?" he demanded.

"It shall be put off no longer. I know I have kept you waiting, and you have been very patient. One week from to-night, I will become your wife."

"And you will promise not to have any more interviews with this infernal rascal, Idaho!"

"Of course I will!"

He kissed her then, and they turned to enter the hotel.

Just as they did so, a colored man came out and met them—a grinning African who was usually employed as porter around the hotel.

"Well, what do you want?" Lynn demanded, surlily, hating to have his Romeo-and-Juliet scene broken in upon.

"If you please, boss, hyer's de paper w'at Massa Idaho sed I was to fotch you," the colored gent replied, thrusting a note into the New-Yorker's hand, and skurrying away.

Lynn tore open the note, savagely, anticipating what the contents would be.

Written in a rapid, nervous hand, the note was as follows:

"LOAFER LYNN:—Your cowardly assault proves that you are a miserable black hearted coward and sneak, and if you dare, I challenge you to come down into the street and fight. If you dare not, the gang 'll hoot you out of town as they do every low-lived, ill-bred cur, of your stamp. Presuming you have some spunk and honor, if small in amount,

"I am yours disgustedly,

"IDAHO!"

Mr. Bayard Lynn fairly hurled Clio from him, as he finished reading, and rushed down the stairs, three steps at a time!

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT OF NIGHTS.

A LITTLE camp-fire nestling down in the depths of a little canyon, with two persons seated in front of it.

The sight was tempting enough, seeing that the campers were engaged in doing justice to slices of freshly-roasted deer-meat.

Sierra Sam could not stand the temptation any longer, and so strode down a narrow path from among crags, into the bright scene.

He had been wandering about the mountains, pretty nearly without food, since leaving Fairy Flats, and as there was nothing hostile about the campers, he made up his mind to try and purchase a good square meal of them, at least.

No need to describe them—the two persons seated at the camp-fire were Old Tree-Toad and Keno Kate, of whom mention has been made before.

Keno Kate, however, was now attired in a

semi-male hunting-suit of serviceable gray cloth, consisting of top-boots, pants, a hunting-smock which reached to the knee, and was opened with a wide collar, at the throat, and a jaunty sombrero.

If anything, she looked better in this sort of attire than that peculiar to her own sex.

Both Old Tree-Toad and Keno Kate arose as the Californian came striding into their camp.

"Oh! don't be alarmed," Sam said, laughingly. "I'm neither a road-agent nor a red-skin. I'm hungrier, however, than forty starved wolves, an' the smell of your princely repast tempted me to make this rather unceremonious invasion, in hopes that I could purchase a bite of deer-meat."

"No, siree!—ye can't purchase a mouthful, blame you!" Old Tree-Toad said, gruffly. "'ca'se how I've no license ter keep hotel. Thar's ther haunch, howsomever; ef ye wanter help yerself, I've nary an objection."

"Well, I'll not tarry, then, on ceremony," Sam responded, seizing a knife and helping himself forthwith. "Going over to Fairy Flats?"

"Well, et kinder strikes me that we aire," the old man replied. "S'pose you've no 'jections ter tellin' who you aire?"

"Certainly not. I hail to the snow-suggestive name of Sierra Sam."

"What, you Sierra Sam?" both Tree-Toad and Keno Kate exclaimed, together, exchanging glances.

"Yes, I am Sierra Sam. Why?"

"Oh, nothing! We've heard of some of your detective exploits—that's all," Kate answered.

But Sierra Sam was not quite so sure that this *was* all. He had noted the exchange of glances, and read in them more than ordinary meaning.

"Sence I've met ye, I'd like ter ax ye a few questions, consarnin' things in Fairy Flats," remarked Tree-Toad.

"Certainly. Ask away, and I'll endeavor to accommodate you if it lies in my power."

"I thort I'd jest inquire ef ye know'd any one thar by the name o' Carlyle?"

Sierra Sam started, but did not particularly show the surprise he may have felt.

"There is such a party, in Fairy Flats, I believe—David Carlyle," he said.

"That's ther man!" Old Tree-Toad muttered, looking to Keno Kate. "D'ye know whether he is settled there permanently, or not?"

"I should judge not. Do you know this Carlyle?" asked Sam.

"Know him? Well, I should rather chuckle. He'll know Old Tree-Toad—that's me, too, when I see him!"

There was a silence then; both Tree-Toad and Keno Kate appeared to be busy with their own thoughts, and Sam did not choose to arouse them.

It was evident to the Californian that they were after the Carlyles.

After several minutes of silence, Sam broke the monotony.

"I presume you have been a resident of this country for some time, Tree-Toad," he said, lighting his own pipe.

"Lordy! yes—nigh onter forty year, now,

Sam'l. I guess I know purty nigh every blade o' grass from Winnepeg ter Waco."

"Probably. You must have had many singular adventures. Do you ever think you saw me before?"

"No—don't think I did."

"Did you ever find a man asleep upon the prairie, and steal from him a little girl, and make off with her?"

Both Tree-Toad and Kate uttered exclamations of surprise and indignation.

"I hope you do not take us for child-stealers, sir," Keno Kate observed, her eyes flashing, while Old Tree-Toad re-echoed her sentiments with a grunt.

"I preferred no charge; I simply asked the question," Sam said, undauntedly. "You know it is a detective's privilege to ask questions irrespective of persons."

"I suppose so. Well, of course it is quite unnecessary for us to answer your question. We do not make our living by stealing, sir."

"Evasion," Sam commented in his thoughts, but he said nothing further, and soon after took his departure, expressing his intention of putting several miles more between him and Fairy Flats before morning.

Instead, however, he made a detour and retraced his way toward the mining metropolis; but, after going a couple of miles he became convinced that he was followed, as he could quite distinctly hear the sound of footsteps in his rear.

Who was dogging him?

Down into the office of the hotel rushed Mr. Bayard Lynn, precipitately, with "blood in his eye," literally, and a savage expression of countenance.

The object of his recent attack stood leaning against the counter, looking none the worse for his fall, except that his face betokened his anger.

Lynn rushed up to him fairly foaming with rage.

"Look here," he yelled, "did you mean to call me a loafer and a coward, sir? Did you dare to insinuate such a thing?"

"I believe I endeavored to convey such a meaning in my note to you," the gambler replied, coolly. "I, moreover, challenged you to come down and give me satisfaction."

"Then you shall have it!" Lynn roared, and making a lunge, he hit Idaho a heavy blow in the face.

Though staggered, the man of cards was not disconcerted, but recovering from the shock, he leaped toward the New-Yorker; his white fist shot out with astonishing celerity, and down went Lynn upon his back with a suddenness only equaled by the gambler's blow.

For a moment Lynn seemed more dead than alive, but he finally struggled to his feet.

"Measure off a dueling ground," he cried. "I'll have revenge for this or die in the attempt."

"That's the way to talk," Idaho cried, showing his pearly teeth in an evil smile. "Let's adjourn immediately to the open air, gents."

An adjournment was made instantan-

It does not take the average "crowd" in a mining settlement long to "adjourn" to any given place when a fracas of any sort is impending.

Out into the street surged the crowd, to be augmented by another element already outside, and in a jiffy the middle of the street was cleared, and thirty paces measured off.

"Gents, aire this hyer to be fer fun or funeral?" an old white-haired, long-bearded chap asked, stepping forward—a man whose tattered garb and hatless head caused him to look not unlike Rip Van Winkle after his alleged sleep of twenty years.

"For funeral, of course!" roared Lynn. "When I am insulted, I fight in earnest."

"Ditto here!" Idaho reported.

"Bully spunk, gents! Durn my old white hairs, ef I don't admire it. But, boyees, I'm an older pilgrim than ye, an' I wanten argy thet you'd better ask fergiveness fer all yer sins afore et's tew late. Fer ther man who doan't git killed ain't no better nor he w'at's kilt, fer I shall challenge him to fight wi' me."

"Who may you be?" Idaho demanded. "Better shet up, or you'll git popped over instanter. This is our sociable, not yours."

"Ken't help thet. I've got a lip, an' a right ter use it. My name's Dyspepsia Jim, from Twin Butte, an' I kin shute straighter, preach a better sarmon an' drink more inches o' bug-juice than any other two-legged biped that evyer chawed b'ar-meat. So neow, gents, ef ye'll git ready, I'll see thet this hyer dissolution o' arthly ties is properly conducted."

As no one volunteered to act for the opponents, Dyspepsia Jim had the self-imposed honor all to himself, without interference.

The two men took positions facing each other, each armed with a cocked revolver.

Idaho looked as calm and self-possessed as though he were going to engage in a game of ball; but Lynn was flushed with anger, and seemed exceedingly nervous.

The crowd that lined either side of the street stood with bated breath; it was a scene they appreciated to the full extent of their rugged natures.

"Brace up, gents!" Dyspepsia Jim ordered. "I shall presently screech out, 'Eucher, poker, keno.' When I say *keno*, shoot."

Up came the duelists' weapons to a level.

"All ready!" warned the white-haired delegate. "Eucher! poker! *keno*!"

Bang!

Two jets of flame leaped forth from the weapons, the reports of which were simultaneous.

With a groan, Bayard Lynn fell to the ground, his hand pressed upon his bosom.

A woman's scream rung out just then; it didn't come from the balcony of the Cosmopolitan.

A male-clad figure, of feminine outline, darted from one side of the street, and in a moment more was kneeling beside the fallen man.

"Oh, Barry! Barry!" she cried, and then burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

This person was Keno Kate!

Dyspepsia Jim regarded her a moment in great surprise, as if the sight gave him more than an ordinary start.

"Oh, he ain't dead, gal!" he said. "Don't cry fur nothin'."

He turned then and faced Idaho.

"We shall have to fight this out, Idaho," he said, his eyes roving along the side of the street, as he spoke.

He gave a violent start then, as he beheld a woman standing upon a knoll, just back of the line of spectators; in her hand was a leveled revolver.

The revolver was leveled in the direction of Keno Kate!

Dyspepsia Jim's arm went up with a spasmodic jerk, and the gold-plated weapon in his hand spoke forth spitefully.

Another scream pealed out upon the night, and the arm of the woman on the knoll fell to her side, shattered at the wrist.

Just then a riderless horse came dashing down the street.

As it was passing, Dyspepsia Jim vaulted into the saddle, gave vent to a wild, sarcastic yell of laughter, and dashed away, soon disappearing from view behind a turn in the street.

By a sudden change of mind, he had evidently concluded not to engage in a duel with Mr. Idaho.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CASE OF BRAIN FEVER, AND—"OH, GEORGE!"

THE woman who had fallen over on the knoll, was the "Doctor."

Several who had chanced to see her fall, ran over to her, more out of curiosity than sympathy.

She was veiled, as usual, and arose to a sitting posture.

"Go away! go away!" she cried, imperiously, binding up her shattered, bleeding wrist in a pocket-handkerchief. "I do not want any of your assistance. I can attend to myself."

Several turned away at this decided rebuff. Not so with the gambler, Idaho, however.

"Well, scorch my eyes!" he gasped, in astonishment. "Is it possible this is you, Clennie?"

She started—it might have been at his suddenness of speech.

"Were you addressing me, sir?" she snapped back, "for if you were, you are evidently off your reckoning."

"Oh! is that possible? Well, excuse me, then. I really took you to be a former friend of mine named Clennie!"

And Mr. Idaho walked away toward the hotel, a peculiar expression upon his face.

"I wonder if she takes me for a fool!" he muttered. "As if I didn't know that voice!"

Keno Kate was still kneeling beside Bayard Lynn, who had fainted, and was sobbing as if her heart would break.

She evidently supposed the New-Yorker was dead; at least she refused to listen to one of the miners who argued that "it wasn't no use ter bawl."

David Carlyle came out upon the balcony of the Cosmopolitan, where Clio was leaning against the railing, pale and wild-eyed.

"Have you been taking in the tableau down yonder?" he asked, dryly.

She nodded her head.

"Lynn is a fool!" Carlyle said. "I don't see how he dared tackle the gambler. By the way, if I ever see you talking with that puppy again, I'll kill you both!"

"You and Mr. Idaho were probably acquainted in the past!" Clio cried, rather fiercely.

"Yes; I have had the honor of meeting the gent once before. He is no company for you; besides, you owe your time and attention to Lynn," with a frown.

"I am not so sure of that. He evidently has another claimant to his attention, judging by yonder spectacle. Who is that woman, in male attire?"

"I don't know; some wandering crank. Ah! see!"

A man was seen rushing toward where Keno Kate was crying, beside Lynn.

The man was Old Tree-Toad.

He reached her side, caught her by one arm and forced her to rise to her feet.

"Kate! Kate!" he cried, shaking her. "What d'ye mean, ye foolish child?"

"Take me where I can lie down!" Kate gasped, clutching at the air, and then going off into a swoon.

A miner immediately stepped forward, and offered the hospitality of his shanty, near at hand, and Kate was raised, and carried toward it by Old Tree-Toad.

Other hands raised Bayard Lynn, and conveyed him to the hotel.

Mrs. "Doctor" arose from the knoll, and walked away toward her own domicile, quietly, despite the pain in her wrist.

Thus ended that night's tragic street scene!

Mr. Bayard Lynn was not badly wounded, and promised to be around in a few days. The bullet had cut a channel across his breast but had done no serious damage.

Miss Carlyle was an efficient nurse, and did not neglect him for a minute, which was so agreeable to Lynn's ideas of true devotion that he quite forgot his rival, Mr. Idaho.

Keno Kate fared not so well as the man she had wept over.

When she awoke from the swoon, she was delirious, and rapidly developed symptoms of brain fever.

Old Tree-Toad was alarmed, and foreseeing trouble, rented the miner's shanty, and prepared to make the best of the situation.

The miner's wife supplied Kate with proper garments, and she was put to bed, and a doctor at once sent for.

He came, administered sedatives, and then departed, promising to call again.

Several days passed, but Kate grew worse instead of better, and was constantly delirious and burning up with fever.

One night, Old Tree-Toad heard a rap at the door, which he opened, to find Dyspepsia Jim standing without.

"Evenin' to ye!" James accosted, doffing his hat. "I heerd yer gal war bad off, an' tho't I'd drap down, an' see ef ye hev any jections o' my takin' a luk at her. I'm suthin' o' a doctor, mysef, an' my name's Dyspepsia Jim."

Tree-Toad had heard him talked of, in con-

nection with the duel; he looked the man over, keenly, and then admitted him.

After a few remarks, Dyspepsia Jim went and seated himself at the bedside and felt the girl's pulse.

"Bad!" he said, with a nod to Tree-Toad. "If permitted to rage until the ninth day, the fever will use her up. If ye want, I kin fetch her around, natteral, inside o' three days."

"I reckon ye don't kno' no more than the doctor," Tree-Toad grunted.

"Perhaps not, though I kin do what I say. Shall I consider myself engaged?"

"No. Let the gal alone. She'll come around all right arter the fever has its run."

"Afraid not—afraid not!" Dyspepsia muttered, rising to depart. "Do as ye like, tho'."

He took his leave with a strange head-shake.

He had not been gone long when another rap came, and this time, when Old Tree-Toad opened the door, Mr. Bayard Lynn stepped into the shanty.

The old scout uttered a growl at sight of him.

"Pshaw! Curb your irascible temper," Lynn said. "There is no need of our being enemies."

"No need!" Tree-Toad echoed, his visage darkening with a frown. "What brings you here, man? Would ye mock ther gal's misery?"

"I came to see Kate!" Lynn answered, going toward the bedside. "I remember of her coming to me just before I fainted—so when I got able to get about to-night, I came to see her."

He went over to the bedside and gazed down at the sick girl, his face the scene of many conflicting emotions.

"Why did you come here?" Lynn demanded, turning away finally, and dropping into a chair. "Was it because you thought to find me here?"

"We come hyer fer a purpose," Tree-Toad responded. "I knew you was heer, but I didn't think Kate did, or I shouldn't 'a' come. It war a sin ter hev her see you again."

"Poor child! I am sorry myself."

"You sorry!" the old man hissed, his hands shutting, and his eyes burning with a strange fire. "What care you, devil that ye aire? Ye won ther gal's innocent young heart, an' then ye deserted her. Cuss ye, Lynn, I've a notion to throttle ye right here!"

The New-Yorker grew a shade whiter.

"Pshaw! man; you might know I never meant that little courtship at your cabin, four years ago. I was out on a lark then, and to indulge in a bit of romance like that was simply recreation."

"Fine recreation, wasn't it, to win an honest girl's love, and her promise of marriage, only to heartlessly desert her?" Tree-Toad sneered, savagely. "You'll find out you ain't through with this matter yet, by a long shot."

"What do you mean, man?"

"Just what I tell ye. Ye ain't thru wi' ther matter yet. Ye'll find thet ther gal ain't so easily trifled with."

"Bah! she had better keep her peace. I can never be anything to her, and she need not come sniveling around after me."

"Humph! Don't worry! She'll never ask ye to care for her. Revenge will be her motive if she gets well."

"Oh, well, we'll look to it that she does not trouble any one!" Lynn returned, with a sarcastic laugh, as he turned and left the shanty.

A couple of more days rolled by.

Fairy Flats was still in a state of feverish excitement.

The escape of Sierra Sam had not improved matters, as regarded the mystery which overhung the little metropolis.

The mystery still remained.

The startling imprints of the bloody boots were daily found in one portion of the town or another—always where the ground or rock was bare, so that they would show distinctly, and generally about a dozen tracks, ending close to where they had begun, leaving no clew to the hiding-place of the owner.

Other footprints, unstained, generally led from the spot to some adjacent place where the trail could be lost among grass or bushes.

On two occasions, within as many days, the same mysterious imprints had been found upon the floor of the Miner's Rest, much to the increased horror and uneasiness of the *habitues* of that resort.

Suspicion was centered upon several different strange characters, but nothing could be proved against them.

But, at last, the Vigilantes became suspicious of a recent new-comer to the town, whose movements were not above suspicion, and who gave his name as George Gerald.

He spent nearly all his time at the gaming-table; but when not there he never could be found about the settlement, which fact, in a measure gave rise to the suspicion against him.

One evening, as Gerald was seated at Idaho's table, playing a game of poker, the saloon door opened, and a miner rushed in.

"More bloody footprints!" he cried, in a loud voice. "Yes, hyar they aire, leadin' right inter the shebang!"

All was excitement in an instant, and the occupants of the saloon crowded toward the door, with drawn revolvers and fierce cries, as though they were setting forth to encounter a small army instead of a few bloody footprints.

The miner had not lied; the prints were upon the door-sill, on the steps outside, and just within the saloon upon the floor—a dozen imprints of a bloody boot, the whole shape of the sole and heel showing!

The impression had not been there many minutes either—for the crimson stain was fresh upon the floor!

Who had left the strange marks?

That was the query plainly expressed upon the faces of those who stood staring at the tracks and at each other.

"Boyees," Johnson exclaimed, "ther feller who trod in them tracks aire in this room, and now I swear et's our duty to not let the owner leave the shebang alive. All in favor o' that motion make manifest by saying I!"

A tremendous shout of "I!" went up.

No stronger verdict of the sentiments of the rough audience need have been given.

"I reckon our eyes hev all bin open, fellers!" pursued Johnson, "an' we've formed opinions accordingly. S'picion is particularly against one man, an' that aire pilgrim's now in this

room. 'Tain't no use ter argy or parley wi' matters o' this stamp; I say, let's nab the galoot an' string him up ter tner big oak in front o' the Miner's Rest!"

"Hurra! hurra!" shouted the crowd.

They turned and glared toward the card-table, where George Gerald still sat, engaged in the game with Idaho.

Then they rushed upon him with vengeful cries, seized him, and dragged him out of the saloon.

Poor Gerald!

It was all a surprise to him; he was too thoroughly astounded to give utterance to protest.

Out into the busy night scene of the young city was he hustled, to a position neath the spreading branches of the old oak; a halter thrown around the stoutest branch, and then, one end of it was noosed about the victim's neck.

"For God's sake, men!" Gerald managed to gasp—"what do you mean?"

"You'll find out," roared Johnson, "you'll find out! We'll see ef ye kin make any bloody tracks in ther air. Git ready, boyees—when I say ther word, give the cuss a h'ist!"

"Stop! stop! I protest against this outrage!"

It was a woman's voice that spoke; the words were uttered in a piercing shriek, and the next instant Clio Carlyle dashed in upon the scene, hatless, and her hair streaming in a disheveled mass.

"Stop! I command you!" she cried, flourishing a revolver; then she threw herself forward at Gerald's feet, and seized hold of him, as if to prevent the execution.

"Oh! George! George!" she cried, bursting into a paroxysm of sobs!

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN WHO LAUGHED.

IT was a scene of an unusual character—the men of Fairy Flats knew not hardly how to understand it all.

But if the would-be lynchers were surprised at the sudden interference of Miss Clio Carlyle, their surprise was evidently no greater than that of George Gerald.

He gazed down at the woman at his feet, a strange unforgiving expression coming over his face, a revengeful glitter in his eyes.

"Arise, lady!" he said, rather sternly. "There is no need of this scene!"

"Oh! George! Oh! George!—forgive me, and do not send me away!" Miss Carlyle sobbed, clinging the closer to him.

"Ay! I will turn you away, as you did me!" Gerald cried, bitterly—"then our accounts will be settled. Go! Away with you to your rich New York lover, who maybe wants you!"

He stooped, raised her to her feet, and pushed her away from him.

Understanding his desire, a couple of miners took her by the arm and led her toward the hotel, whither she went like a creature dazed.

"Gentlemen, if you propose to hang me for something I fail to understand, you had better proceed to business before there is any further interference."

Gerald spoke with reckless coolness, now;

since the interview with Miss Carlyle, he seemed to have undergone a great change.

"Yes, boyees, git ready," Johnson commanded. "When I yell *three*, give Mr. Bloody Boots a boost!"

"Stop! he who pulls a finger's weight upon that rope, is a dead man!"

Stern and commanding rung the order, and all eyes turned in the direction whence came the command.

But they looked in vain.

Nowhere was the owner of the voice to be seen.

"Stop!" came the order again, a minute later. "It is Sierra Sam who speaks, and his aim never fails."

"Ba-a-ah!" returned the man, Johnson. "You cannot frighten us out of our vengeance. Get ready, boyees—one, two, *three*! The rooster crows, and away she goes!"

And up into mid-air swung Mr. Gerald.

Bang! bang! bang!

Three times a rifle spoke, spitefully, and in rapid succession.

One bullet struck Johnson, the leader of the lynch picnic, a second cut the rope that suspended George Gerald in mid-air, and the third struck one of the men who had pulled on the rope.

Gerald dropped lightly to his feet, and taking advantage of the confusion, made a desperate run for liberty, and succeeded in escaping around the corner of an adjacent building ere he could receive any harm from the several pistol-shots fired after him.

"Ha! ha! ha! for once score three for Sierra Sam!" cried the voice of the unseen detective. "You'll find before Sam'l gets through wi' ye, men o' Fairy Flats, that you took sides against the wrong man. Hurrah for Bloody Boots!"

A rush was made by the infuriated miners in the direction whence came the tones, but a scouring search failed to discover the dauntless detective.

He had come and gone with scarcely less mystery than the terrible owner of the bloody boots.

Moses Isaacs was a man who always had a snug sum of money about him, and yet never had any trouble thereat, for road-agents were a superfluity as yet unknown in and about Fairy Flats.

The night following that of Gerald's escape from lynch law, the wily Jew was returning from a periodical nocturnal visit to Shanghai Camp, when a calamity befell him that he had no idea of encountering.

He was riding along through a lonely mountain pass, when his horse was jerked suddenly back upon its haunches, and Isaacs found himself stretched upon his back on the hard gulch bottom.

Before he could arise, a half-dozen masked men sprung upon him and bound his hands; then he was placed upon his feet, and marched off up a side ravine.

"Shents, I dells you you haff got der wrong man!" he protested, in vigorous tones. "I don'd vas der feller you vant, at all!"

The outlaws made no reply, nor did they pay

any attention to the Jew's gabble, but marched him along, maintaining a grim silence.

In a few minutes a camp-fire was reached in the ravine, where another road-agent evidently was awaiting the arrival of the others.

Isaacs was summarily bound to a tree, near at hand, after which the outlaw at the camp-fire, who apparently was the captain, came forward.

"Well, Dutchy, how do you feel?" he asked in a seemingly feminine voice.

"Shimminy, but I feel vorse ash bad. I haff a pig pain mit mine heart; so uff you vill blease let me go back to Fairy Flats, I vill be your uncle ash long ash vot I liff!" Isaacs groaned.

"Ha! ha! Pretty good of you, garlies; but you see we've got some important biz with you before we turn you loose to graze. If you whack up what information we want, so good!"

"If you don't, we're goin' to skin you alive," put in another.

"I haff no information; I don't vas knows anydings. I haff noddings you vant," declared Isaacs.

"Oh, yes, you have. Here's a roll of g. b.'s," the captain said, taking a huge wad of greenbacks from Isaac's vest pocket. "That will help along our benevolent association amazingly. And now, let's get down to business. Do you know such a person as David Carlyle?"

"Nix! Neffer heard uff dot veller."

"That's one lie. Did you ever hear of White Eagle, the half-breed?"

"Neffer! so helb me."

"Two lies. Do you know anything in regard to a certain little iron safe box, Isaacs?"

"Noddings."

"Pshaw! don't be a fool, Isaacs, and try to play off, for it won't work on us. You know the secret of where that little iron box is, and you may as well tell us and done with it, and save yourself trouble."

"I dells you I don'd vas know noddings about such a box," Isaacs reiterated.

"Stop lying! I am positive you know where the box is, or else have it in your possession, and I'll kill you but what you shall tell me."

"Gott in Himmel! I dells you der druth und noddings else. I don'd know vot you mean. I don'd know anydings apoud a box."

"We'll see," the outlaw captain cried. "Boys, take off his shoes and tickle his feet. If that don't fetch him to time, we'll cut off his toes."

Acting according to orders, the men promptly proceeded to take off the Jew's shoes and stockings, and he was also bound higher up the tree, so that his feet did not touch the ground.

Then one road-agent took charge of each foot and began to tickle the bottom of it, while the others attacked the other ticklish parts of the body in a like manner.

A broad grin began to illuminate Isaacs's countenance, and he squirmed like an eel; but it was no use, as there was no escaping from the custody of the strong confining lariats.

From a provoked grin, Isaacs burst into a roar of irrepressible laughter that made the mountain echoes ring—a laugh incessant, which, though merry to hear, was caused by excruciating torture to him—torture so great that in a few moments he fainted dead away.

"That'll do," the captain said. "Get some water and fetch him to."

The water was procured and dashed into Isaacs's face in a liberal quantity, and had the effect of soon restoring him to consciousness.

"Well, what's your answer now, Dutchy?" the captain demanded, grimly.

"Noddings!" Isaacs declared, stoutly. "I dell you go to der duyfel!"

"You're a bad patient, and we shall have to doctor you, then. No. 3, take your knife and cut off the five toes of the left foot."

Isaacs grew pale and groaned.

No. 3 drew a keen-edged knife and knelt before the victim.

But he was never permitted to do the bloody work the outlaw chief had directed, for there came a yell—a clatter of horses' feet; then a fusilade of pistol-shots, which dropped four of the outlaws, including the man of the knife, and a horseman came dashing down upon the scene with a vengeful yell.

Astonished and alarmed, the three remaining outlaws took to their heels and fled from the spot as swiftly as possible, succeeding in making good their escape.

A moment later Sierra Sam dashed up to where Isaacs was confined, and dismounted.

A glance at the outlaws showed him that they were unable to commit further earthly sin.

He then turned to Isaacs, whose face lighted up gladly when he saw who it was.

"Well, Isaacs, didn't I tell you your head was too thick to keep you out of trouble?" Sam accosted.

"Yesh, dot was so. I neffer doubt you any more, Sammy, if you yoost vill set me free."

"Why, ain't you happy, Isaacs? I saw you laughing a bit ago."

"Dunder and plitzen! dey vas dicklin' mine feet mit der bottoms like I couldn't stand it. I dink I vas die mit all dot laugh!"

"Well, I think I enjoyed it at a distance fully as much as you did. I never knew a shylock could laugh before."

"Vel, dot don'd matter. I vant to get free."

"Maybe you do. What do you say to going in partnership with me now to ferret out this matter of the missing box and the lost heir of White Eagle?"

Isaacs looked grim.

"I don'd vas know apoud dot. I haff got an engagement already."

"So I am aware; but, let me inform you that my position as a detective gives me authority to arrest all murderers!"

"Der duyfel! I vas no murderer."

"Not now, maybe; but if you were to hunt up that child and deliver it up to David Carlyle and his daughter, you would be accessory to a murder; for, as you perhaps know, their only desire to get the child is so that they can put it forever out of the way, and thus destroy a clew of Miss Carlyle's former marriage. You, in such a case, would be an accessory to the crime and get your just deserts, you can bet. You know how law goes in these parts."

"Gott in Himmel! I dinks you vas righd. I gladt you dells me dot. I vas an honest man, Sammy—I neffer dold von lie, so helb me Shorge Vashington's cherry-tree. I giff up der

gase und go in snucks mit you. Yaw, dot ish yoost vot I do, py blitzten."

"All right. It's settled, then. You are not to let Carlyle know but what you are faithful to him, and I'll have his neck in a noose before long."

Sierra Sam then released the Jew, and they both mounted the detective's horse and started off for Fairy Flats.

About the same hours of the same evening Mr. Bayard Lynn rapped at the door of David Carlyle's private room at the Cosmopolitan, and then entered without awaiting an answer to the summons, to find the Washingtonian seated in a comfortable chair, smoking.

"Ah! you, Lynn! What's the news? Take a seat."

"Well, I've just been figuring up matters to see how I stand," Lynn replied. "My papers and accounts show that I've lent you just five thousand dollars since leaving Washington."

"So much? Oh, well, that's trifling. As soon as I am in possession of my share of my English inheritance, we'll settle up. Undoubtedly I shall find a letter of credit for the amount on my return to Washington."

"Well, of course I'm in no particular hurry; but then this isn't all, by any means."

"Isn't all?"

"No. The note I signed with you in Washington, to help you get money to hush up that Government swindle affair, is long overdue, a letter advises me, and having gone to protest, discovers your property to be mortgaged for its full value to one naturalized Indian named White Eagle. Consequently, a levy has been made upon my Baltimore personal property for the amount—ten thousand dollars. Fine, isn't it?"

"Bad!" Carlyle admitted, anxiously. "I expected to get my inheritance before this, you know—"

"That don't help matters now. I've risked all I can on you, until something's done. I've partly made up my mind to cut loose from you and your daughter altogether. There is only one thing that shall deter me!"

"That is—"

"Miss Carlyle must become my wife at once—to-night. If not, to-morrow I pack off for New York!"

David Carlyle smothered a groan, and arose to his feet with a white but resolute face.

"Clio shall marry you to-night!" he said, in a husky voice.

CHAPTER X.

CLIO CARLYLE'S STRANGE STORY.

BUT the marriage was destined not to come off that night. Upon going to Miss Carlyle's room, the ex-government official made the discovery that she was not there. Her wraps were also gone, proving that she was out of doors.

"Where in the world can she have gone at night?" he muttered, in alarm. "Perhaps to clandestinely meet the accursed gambler, Idaho. This must be kept from Lynn."

He went back and found the New-Yorker.

"It is all right," the announced. "She will

be ready within an hour, as soon as she can fix herself. So, while you prepare yourself, I'll run out and see what can be scared up in the way of a minister."

Somewhat appeased at the prospect of the early consummation of his fondest desires, Lynn betook himself to his room to prepare for the nuptials.

A little while earlier, the same evening, Dyspepsia Jim, the man of the snow-white hair and beard, left the shanty of Moses Isaacs and hurried through the town, taking a route in the rear of the cabins that lined the main street.

Like a shadow a woman emerged from behind a cabin and followed his footsteps, keeping at a safe distance behind him.

A short walk brought Dyspepsia Jim to an old shanty which had been somewhat scorched with fire, and only the front part of which was habitable.

He opened the door and entered—the woman, who was by this time close to his heels, entered also, ere he could close the door.

Consequently, when they came face to face within the dimly-lighted room, Dyspepsia Jim gave a start of astonishment.

"Hello!" he ejaculated; "how'd ye come here, marm?"

"I came in directly behind you, sir," Miss Clio Carlyle said, for it was indeed she who had dogged the old man's footsteps.

"Ye did?" Dyspepsia grunted. "Waal, I reckon my ears ain't so peert as they used to be. Besides, I war hev'n' a deep think as I came hyar. What might you want, marm?"

"Sit down and I will tell you, sir," Miss Carlyle answered, sinking into a chair. "I have come here to appeal to your humanity."

"Well, marm, go ahead," he said, taking a fresh cigar from his pocket and lighting it with the blaze of the candle. "I'm open ter heer any propositions or appeals that ye want ter make."

"Please drop that rough sort of language and take off your disguise then. I know you are Sierra Sam, and prefer to talk with you as you are—not as you appear."

The Californian uttered a laugh, as he took off the wig and false beard, and a pleasant expression was upon his handsome face.

"I was not aware that my disguise had yet been penetrated," he said. "In what way shall I consider myself at your service, Mrs. White Eagle Imbrie?"

Clio Carlyle's face flushed, but she bore no appearance of anger.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Imbrie, and I am not ashamed of it. Would to God, sir, my husband were alive to protect me from my persecutors!"

Sierra Sam eyed the woman in astonishment.

"I do not understand you," he said.

"No, I am aware that you don't. Only the One Above understands me, as I am. You believe me to be a bad, scheming woman, sir, whose sole ambition it is to destroy the proofs of my former marriage, that I may be free to wed Bayard Lynn. Tell me—is this not so?"

"Well, I reckon you're pretty near right in the matter," Sam responded, knocking the

ashes from his cigar, and wondering what she was driving at.

"So you may think, but you are wrong—grossly wrong, sir. I do not seek my child, except as a mother. Mr. Slocum, I know you are a detective, and consequently, a man of the world whose business it is to look with suspicion on every one. That is a characteristic of your profession. But, will you believe me when I tell you that I am innocent of all wrong you believe me guilty of?"

"Hardly. I am in duty bound to believe the words of a dying man, in preference to those of a living woman," Sam declared promptly and decidedly.

"Oh! would to Heaven that I could convince you how wrong you are, and enlist your sympathy in my behalf. At the risk of my life have I broken away from my captors, to-night, to come to you for this purpose. Hear me swear, sir, by all I hold sacred, that I am innocent!"

"I am afraid you have selected rather a poor court for your appeal," was Sam's discouraging answer. "Still, even rocks have been moved by prayer, the Holy Writ tells us. If you are so innocent as you would have me believe, perhaps you will have no objections to answering some questions."

"Certainly not. I anticipate what you would ask—I shall be only too glad to answer!"

"Well, to start with, you legally wedded the half-breed, White Eagle, did you not?"

"I did, I am proud to own it!"

"What was the motive, you being a cultured lady of high social standing, and he simply a rough unpolished borderman?"

"I had no selfish motive; I fell in love with him, and married him for himself, and not for his money, as you imagine."

"Are you willing to solemnly swear to the truth of this assertion?"

"Yes, a hundred times, if necessary."

"Then, why did you desert him?"

"Because I was forced to. My father was secretly much opposed to the match, and swore if I did not leave White Eagle, and go away, he would cut his throat in my presence. He was terribly in earnest, and would have done as he said. As I loved my husband too dearly to entertain a thought of losing him in so horrible a manner, I at last consented, and we went back to Washington. Then it was my father made a match for me to marry a very wealthy New-Yorker, Mr. Lynn by name. I refused; and indeed no immediate alliance could have been effected, owing to my previous marriage. My father, however, swore to free me, and all my protests availed nothing. I wrote often to White Eagle, but I believe my letters were intercepted. I should have returned to him but the closest watch was kept over me at all times."

"Why, then, did you refuse to recognize him, when he came to Washington?"

"I saw him but twice. His coming was anticipated, and instructions were given me—to disobey which meant for me to lose my life. During my first interview with White Eagle, an unseen hand—my father's—held a revolver leveled at my heart. He would have murdered

me had I not coldly repulsed my poor husband, as he had directed."

"How about the second visit?"

"That was at night. He came to me, on the sly, and choked out of me the truth of the birth of our child, and its whereabouts, which I had been forbidden to betray to any one, by my father. I thank God he forced me to tell, for no doubt the child would sooner or later have died, where it was, by my heartless parent's agency."

"And so you declare that you have no intentions of marrying Lynn?"

"No! a hundred times no! Were I free to do so, I would not. All I long for is to gain possession of my child, and, with it, fly to parts unknown, where I can do work of some kind to support me and it, and where I shall be a stranger among strangers."

"You speak of freedom—are you not at liberty to marry Lynn, should you choose to do so?"

"Most assuredly not, sir. Lynn is ignorant of my first marriage, and would have nothing to do with me did he know the truth. Besides, it is not certain that White Eagle is dead."

Sierra Sam did not reply. He was watching the beautiful woman, closely, endeavoring to solve the enigma that perplexed him far more than anything else had ever done in his life.

She bore his scrutiny unflinchingly, so anxiously and expectantly, with a piteous, appealing expression about her eyes, that, despite all he could do, Sam could not bring himself to believe she was deceiving him.

If she was, she was indeed a skilled and artful actress.

"Well, I don't hardly know what to say to your remarkable statement," Sam finally declared. "There is one thing certain—if you are lying to me, you are a diabolical monstrosity, not a human being, and there is no earthly excruciating torture sufficient for you."

"I am not lying, I am no demoness. What I've told you is the terrible, solemn truth, and if it were known by my cruel father that I am here telling you this, death would meet me on my return to the hotel."

"Well, what can I say? Is this interview at an end? It is very distasteful to me."

"Why so?"

"Because, I fear to believe you, and still am in duty bound to do so, as I shudder to think you capable of anything so diabolical as a scheme like that against one's own flesh and blood!"

"I beg of you not to believe me so cruel. I beseech you to grant me your friendship and your efforts to recover my child. I have no one else to appeal to, and so I turn to you, my enemy. Of course I must not let my father suspect that I know you, or he would kill me and arouse the town against you!"

"I cannot give you an answer just at present, Mrs. Imbrie. I must have time to thoroughly cogitate on the matter. If I should find your child, I will look to its safety, until I know whether or not you are false to the core."

"You do not know where the child is, then?"

"Of course not."

"Have you any idea who does know?"

"I have not. I am on the lookout, but I have no particular suspicion. By the way, you have a lover?"

"No!" She looked surprised. "Oh! you refer to George Gerald. He has long been a suitor for my hand, but I could not encourage him, and finally rejected him. I thought perhaps I could save him when they were about to hang him."

"You left that honor for me. How about a certain woman called the 'Doctor'?"

"I know nothing about her, except that she and father knew one another, and that she was once infatuated with Lynn."

"Well, I will think over your story, and perhaps help you. More I cannot promise now."

"You are very good, sir. I am sure I shall always feel very grateful to you for even hearing me through. I will go back to the hotel now. Good-evening."

"Good-evening," Sam said, opening the door, and she passed out into the night.

He sat down to deliberate. What was the issue to be? he asked himself over and over.

The days of road-agency in and about Fairy Flats had begun, and their inauguration was the attack upon Moses Isaacs.

Following that incident, two stage-coaches were successfully halted and plundered by the masked road-bandits within as many days, and the reports of the depredations threw the town of Fairy Flats into a great state of excitement.

Next, the post-office was visited in the dead of night, and robbed, and the Overland Express Office met a like fate—both the latter robberies being committed the same night of Clio Carlyle's visit to Sierra Sam.

When discoveries were made of the nocturnal visit, on the following morning, the excitement was intense, when notices were found posted up in both places, which read thus:

"Revenge! Turn your hands against Sierra Sam, will you? Then look out for your pocket-books!"

Was Sierra Sam at the bottom of the mischief, then? It would seem so, judging by the notice, and the populace grew exceedingly wroth, as a matter of course.

Again was the cool Californian a source of annoyance to them, and now in a very expensive way, in the bargain.

The Express Company was out at least five hundred dollars. The post-office was out a hundred.

Enraged were the people, and a mass-meeting was inaugurated in the street to adopt measures for the suppression of the nuisance.

Several miners addressed the crowd in language more forcible than elegant or moral, and after a deal of squabbling, four men were chosen to work up the capture once more of the Californian.

They were Idaho, the gambler, and three toughs named respectively Banks, Butcher and Dolan. To them was to be left the sole work of the capture.

So, as a purse of a thousand dollars reward had been offered for his capture, the quartette resorted to Dolan's shanty to put their heads together and plan a campaign.

A crowd lingered in the street all day, anxious to learn to what conclusion the Picked Four had come; but night drew on and the door of the shanty remained closed, the men not having been seen since they entered.

What was the cause?

From one to another the query passed, and gradually the question became general.

Neither of the four had ever been known to go so long without their whisky!

So a visit was made to Dolan's shanty, and orders given to "open up."

No answer followed. Then the door was battered down.

A startling spectacle met their eyes.

Upon the floor the four men lay outstretched, in a row, stark and stiff in death!

Around them upon the clean pine floor was a circle of the tracks of the Bloody Boots!

CHAPTER XI.

A FATAL CONFLAGRATION.

AGAIN was Fairy Flats thrown into a state of great excitement and consternation.

Four of the young city's deputized Vigilantes lay low neath the blow of the assassin, whose emblem was carried upon his boots.

The news spread like wildfire, and as a matter of course, the populace fairly howled with righteous indignation, and curses and oaths abounded in great plenitude.

The reward for the capture of Sierra Sam was doubled, and guards were sent to watch the different approaches to the town.

Little else was there to do, for the remainder of the population could but stand around and curse and discuss the unenviable situation.

No one knew where to look for the Californian, or for the owner of the Bloody Boots, if, indeed, it were possible that they were not one and the same; no one knew what to do, except keep a sharp lookout, in hopes of capturing their enemy during some of his visits to the town.

But during the course of the evening, a roughly-dressed miner, with startling red hair and beard, put in an appearance, and inquired for the "boss" of the town.

The man Johnson quickly responded.

"I opine thet ar' me, stranger," he declared, with a deal of importance. "I am ther mayor o' this burg, accordin' ter all popular belief, an' consekently I may be calkylated ter be ther boss."

"Keerect! An' I s'pect ye may be ther galoot who backs ther reward fer one Sierra Sam?"

"I have that honor," Johnson vowed, with supreme grace. "I hold the durocks conveniently located in the pocket of my brichelons."

"Waal, that fits me. I'll take 'em!"

"You will?"

"I should snort up a snail ef I hev'n't jest got ther locate o' Sierra Sam's ranch, wi' all ther compass p'int's an' topografferical surveys put down in my noggin. So all ye've got ter do, is whack up yer shekels, an' I'm yer man ter show ye whar serenely sleepeth Sam o' the Sierras."

"Reckon ye're figgerin' arter the money, an' don't know nothin' about the cuss, stranger,"

Johnson declared, suspiciously. "What's yer name?"

"Sandy Doud. I ain't tellin' ye no lie. I discovered Sierra Sam's hang-out, an' ef ye aire willin' ter cash up, I hain't no 'jections ter tell ye where it ar', so ye kin pounce down upon him, while he's asleep, an' do fer him."

Johnson held a consultation with several of the prominent citizens, and all agreed that the best thing to be done was to pay the reward and then kill the red-haired galoot, if he failed to show up Sierra Sam.

When told of the decision, he nodded his approval.

"That's ther ticket, pards, you bet! Jest let me git my bread-hooks onto the rhino, an' ef I don't show you whar Sierra Sam hangs out, ye kin take me an' noose my carcass up to the handiest tree, 'thout parley or preachin'. I ain't no humbug!"

"Waal, here's the money," Johnson said, taking a large package from his pocket. "Now, then, show us w'ar ter find Sierra Sam, or ye'll find thet this will be the onhealthiest climate you ever struck!"

"On course I will!" Doud assented, pocketing his reward, with a grin. "Git yer weepens, an' come along cautious, like a mice, lest ye wake up yer man. Ye know he's subject to funny streaks when crowded upon!"

There was no need to tell the men of Fairy Flats this. They had already had some experience in regard to the Californian's "streaks of humor," and were not exactly anxious for any further exhibition of the same.

Nearly two score of grim and desperate men followed the lead of the red-headed stranger to the vicinity of the fire-ruined shanty.

"Thar! that's whar ye'll find your man," Doud whispered, indicating the shanty. "He bunks in ther front room o' the shebang, disguised, and callin' himself Dyspepsia Jim."

The crowd started and showed surprise. Evidently no suspicion of such a fact had dawned upon them before.

"Et's so," Doud declared, "an' the galoot war in thar asleep a bit ago. Reckon he's thar yet—but ye wanter luck out how ye tackle him. I've hearn tell o' his layin' out half a hundred single-handed, an' et warn't his day fer fightin' neither."

"Yas, you bet ther thing's got ter be got at keerful," Johnson agreed. "He's a hard customer to handle. I reckon ther flip way ter fix him is ter fire his shebang—then git off at a distance, an' plug him when he is forced to vacate."

The plan was approved by the crowd. Coal-oil was secured from the village store, and plenty of inflammable kindlings were silently piled up in various places against the shanty, saturated with the oil; then all were simultaneously ignited.

The crowd spread out in a semicircle, at a distance of a dozen yards from the shanty, to watch the conflagration and be prepared for the sudden appearance of the endangered Californian.

The shanty was dry and of pine lumber, and took readily, the flames soon beginning to run up its sides and light up the night vividly. A sharp breeze sweeping down from the mountains,

helped to fan the flames, and it promised to be not long ere the whole place should be wrapt in a fiery cloud.

"I reckon ye'll see ther galoot come a-hoppin' out now, pretty suddint," Doud observed. "It must be gittin' ruther sultry in thar."

But Sierra Sam came not, although his enemies watched with great expectancy and eagerness.

"Possibly the smoke has suffocated him so that he cannot get out," Johnson suggested. "Phew! I reckon he'll never get out o' thar alive!"

Higher and higher leaped the flames, raging fiercely and crackling weirdly, as if to mock their imprisoned victim.

Suddenly there came a wild yell, partly muffled by the roar of the fire—then an agonized shriek, another and another, all from in the direction of the doomed shanty.

Then the cries ceased, and no more were heard, and the shanty burned down to the ground; the grim crowd of spectators watching in silence, without making an effort to save the victim of their revengeful act.

"Thar! *that* ends Sierra Sam!" Johnson cried out when the house fell in with a dull crash, sending a million sparks flying heavenward. "I reckon we'll have less devilment about Fairy Flats hereafter. Where's Doud?"

When they came to look around, Mr. Doud had already taken his departure.

By informing on the the tenant of the shanty, he had won the reward offered, and taken advantage of the others' interest in the conflagration to quietly make himself scarce.

Who was he?

Behind him, as he left the fire, he had dropped a red wig and false beard—probably as a memento of his visit.

Yet the Flat-ites failed to appreciate his kindness.

The next morning the ashes of the late fire were raked over, and the bones and skull of a human being found—that was all.

When Miss Clio Carlyle heard of Sierra Sam's terrible fate, she made a visit to her father's room and made known to him the whole substance of her recent interview with the Californian.

"You're a clipper!" the parent said, approvingly. "You can beat me at some points of scheming. You think the fellow would eventually have delivered you up the child?"

"I do!" and Miss Clio showed her pearly teeth in a villainous smile. "He was pretty nearly satisfied as to my innocence."

"And now you say he is dead?"

"Yes. It was discovered last night that he was Dyspepsia Jim, and that he tenanted an old shanty where I found him. A descent was made upon the place, it was fired, and Sierra Sam burned alive. This morning, I hear, his bones have been found and buried. That summarily disposes of *his* case!"

"And it is well; for you must marry Lynn at once. It can be put off no longer, or we shall lose our grip on him forever. I had to promise you would marry him last night, but as you did not come in, I had to frame a series of excuses,

promising you will surely wed him this morning. So get ready at once, and we will go to the lawyer's office—for, mind you, Lynn will put up with no more trifling, and he is too valuable a catch for us to lose."

"But will it be safe? Is it yet certain that the child, White Eagle, or the tell-tale box of papers will never turn up?"

"Bah! Who is there to interest themselves in the matter now?"

"White Eagle, maybe."

"Pooh! I don't believe he is living."

Miss Carlyle went and prepared for her marriage, immediately, and inside of an hour she and Bayard Lynn, accompanied by David Carlyle, presented themselves at the office of Moses Isaacs.

The Jew was just sweeping out, but postponed that operation as soon as he saw that he was to be patronized, his eyes gleaming wickedly.

"I have a little job for you, Isaacs," Carlyle said, briskly. "I am going to give away my daughter to Mr. Lynn, here, and I want you to perform the ceremony."

"All righd. I vill do der shob oop all righd for fife dollar, Mr. Carlyle."

Lynn and Clio took their places, and the nuptial knot was soon tied, and a certificate made out and presented to the bride, after which Lynn slipped a gold eagle into Isaac's hand.

"I guess we are ready to go, now," the New-Yorker said.

"Well, no, not just yet," David Carlyle responded. "While I'm here I'm going to make my last will and testament. Mr. Isaacs, you can draw up the formula."

"What is this for?" Lynn demanded. "You are not expecting to leave us suddenly, I hope?"

"Oh! no—not if I can help it; but you know life is uncertain. We have something over two thousand miles to traverse before we get back to Washington, and a part of that is through some of the roughest districts of Western America, where all sorts of crimes and criminals abound. One cannot tell what minute he may meet his death by some accident, or at the hands of some desperado. Therefore, I'm going to be prepared for such an emergency."

"I think yours is a most excellent idea, and I believe I will also profit by it. Were anything to happen to me and I not have a will, it might cost my wifey here, quite a struggle to hold her own," Lynn said, earnestly.

And so it was arranged.

Isaacs drew up wills for both men in favor of Mrs. Lynn, and they were properly signed and witnessed.

Then the bridal party went slowly back to the hotel, where a startling surprise awaited them.

Upon the carpet of David Carlyle's room, in a dozen places where the groundwork was of a light hue, were the distinct imprints of the Bloody Boots!

An alarm was at once given, and a search made, throughout the hotel, with, of course, no satisfactory result.

Nothing of Bloody Boots, who or whatever he might be, could be found.

How he had obtained access to Carlyle's room was as much a mystery as the existence of the

myth itself, for the room had been locked, when left, and was still locked on the return of the bridal party!

The news spread throughout the town, and once more threw the people into a state of consternation. And the most "broke up" man of the lot was Johnson.

"Boyées," he said, to a party of miners who gathered around him, "I reckon we orter go shute ourselves!"

"Why so?" a man asked.

"Beca'se we had. Ye allow thet we burnt Sierra Sam up?"

"Waal?"

"An' I reckon ther chief cause o' our doin' it war because we thought he war connected wi' this bloody-fut bizness?"

There was a murmur of assent.

"Well, ye see, now, that we war mistaken. Sierra Sam is dead, an' still the bloody-booted galoot cavorts around. Teil ye what it is, boys, I believe Sierra Sam war a squar' feller, after all, and innocent o' the charges that were made ag'in' him."

"Durned ef et don't look so," several chorused. "In that case, we're a pack o' murderers."

"That's whar the boot pinches," Johnson admitted. "Cuss me ef I ain't ashamed o' myself. And now, I fer one propose that we investigate the durned rock mystery. Et won't take long to blow et up and find out its secret. I'll lend a hand at the drillin' myself."

The proposal was hailed with delight by the majority of the rough audience, and it was settled that the rock should be destroyed.

Proper tools, drills and a keg of giant powder were procured, and a large throng made a descent upon the rock of mystery, with its strange inscriptions.

An immediate attack was begun, with numerous drills, into the sides of the great stone, and the day was spent in the work.

By sunset fifteen holes had been drilled a foot or more into the rock, and heavily charged with powder. To each blast was attached a long fuse, and all fuses were connected by a train of powder, so that one flash would ignite them all, and cause a nearly simultaneous explosion.

The crowd was then ordered back to a safe distance, and just as the good-natured face of Old Sol gave his good-night grin and sunk below the horizon, Johnson fired the main train, and ran for his life for a place of safety.

There was a bright flash, which ignited the connecting fuses—then they burned slowly but surely toward the charged rock.

CHAPTER XII.

TREE-TOAD AND CARLYLE.

NEARER and nearer to the charged rock crept the glowing spark at the end of each fuse, and the crowd watched at a safe distance with eager interest.

Bang!

Like unto the shock of an earthquake was the report; the ground trembled for an instant as though in an ague-fit; large chunks of the rock flew high into the air, and the whole stone was riven into a hundred pieces.

Immediately after the explosion, the miners, headed by Johnson, began an examination of

the detached pieces, but with no result in further clearing up the mystery.

Each chunk of rock was solid as solid could be, and there was no evidence of there having been any sort of chamber in the interior of the rock.

So that, after all, there was no approach to a solution of how the rock came there, and Johnson and his gang mechanically retraced their footsteps into Fairy Flats, where there was at least liquid satisfaction to be had for those who had sufficient money to buy the "p'izen;" and there were few in the young metropolis so utterly "broke up" that they had not the wherewith to purchase whisky.

Upon the front door of the shanty which Old Tree-Toad and Keno Kate occupied, the next morning, was the imprint of a bloody boot—the same terrible emblem that had from time to time been found in other parts of the town.

A miner discovered it, and called old Tree-Toad from his faithful watch by the bedside of Keno Kate, and directed his attention to it.

"Waal, durn my boots!" the old borderman ejaculated, when he saw it; "ther devil's set his foot ag'in' my door, at last! I guess thet settles it with the gal; et's a warnin' thet she's goin' ter die, after all the fuss!"

This miner was a new-comer to the town, who, owing to his great amount of black hair and beard, had been dubbed Black Jack.

"So yer gal ain't no better, eh?" he queried.

"No—she has been worse, during the night, and I can see no sign of probable improvement, hereafter. I want to run up for the doctor, this morning; would ye mind just stoppin' in a minute till my return?"

"On course not—allus willin' ter accommodate!" Black Jack said, following the old man into the shanty.

After putting on his hat and boots, Old Tree-Toad took his departure, leaving Black Jack on duty.

Keno Kate lay, white and restful on the bed.

Though her eyes were closed in apparent slumber, her lips frequently moved, and she uttered some indistinct sentences.

Drawing his stool to her bedside, Black Jack watched her features narrowly and listened to catch the drift of what she said.

"Idyl! Idyl!" she called, faintly; "don't run away—that's a dear!"

Black Jack bent closer toward her.

"She shall not! She shall not!" the delirious girl murmured. "Bury the truth with me! I—I—"

She uttered a gasp; there was a rattling sound in her throat, and a rigid contraction of the features, that warned Black Jack that she was dying.

Old Tree-Toad and the doctor hastened into the room just then, in time to comprehend the situation and see the last spark of life flutter out.

Keno Kate was dead, and by her bedside knelt Old Tree-Toad, with clasped hands and eyes upraised.

"Hear me, oh, Lord," he groaned, tears running down his furrowed cheeks. "I have

watched over and protected her through life, and the end is not yet. I shall never rest until I avenge her. Then my mission is complete."

Arrangements were made, and Keno Kate's funeral occurred the next afternoon, and there was a liberal turnout by such miners as chanced to be blessed with families.

Kate's remains were incased in a plain but pretty coffin, and she was buried just beyond the village, where a grave had been dug upon a sightly knoll, beneath a shading cottonwood.

After the burial, Old Tree-Toad went back to Fairy Flats, his rugged face even more grim and stern than was its usual wont.

He had been abroad but little since coming to the mining-camp, owing to his unceasing devotion to Kate; therefore he had never met David Carlyle.

But he met him now, just as the Washingtonian was coming out of the Cosmopolitan, and the two stopped and glared at each other in mutual recognition.

"Well! well!" Carlyle ejaculated.

"Ay, well, well," Tree-Toad said, in a tone by no means friendly. "Are you sure, however, that it is well for you that we meet, David Carlyle?"

"Why not? It can avail you nothing to war against me. Come to my room, where there are less ears to listen."

"Oh, so you *are* afraid, eh?" the old man sneered, following him. "It need not trouble you. You will get exposed by me whether you try to screen it or not."

Carlyle did not reply until they reached his room; then he turned fiercely upon Tree-Toad:

"Have you been hunting all these years for me?" he demanded.

"All these years," Tree-Toad responded. "I felt et in my bones that sooner or later we should meet."

"Humph! and now that we have met, what do you propose to do?"

"What d'ye s'pose? D'ye think I've been lookin' fer ye all these years fer nothin'?"

"Perhaps not. You think to kill me, but you had better think twice before attempting such a crime. I am always armed and on my guard."

"Pooh! It would be no trick to do that, were that my purpose, but et ain't. Thar's a sweeter way o' gettin' revenge."

"Oh, is there? No doubt you think arrest and conviction would strike me harder. To such an idea I say—bah! You have no proof aside from your own word, and mine is a deal stronger than yours. The result of arrest and trial would be my acquittal."

"Ye lie!" Tree-Toad growled. "Have ye fergotten the case? Mebbe a review of it will awaken ye. Ye married my sister in New Orleans years ago, when ye war young and orter 'a' been honest. After a while ye left her, on bizness, and forgot to return. I wrote to Washington and discovered ye to be a bigamist, you having married a second time. I warned you of impending trouble, but ye didn't answer. One night my sister was found murdered, and the child of her union with you, badly wounded. The child survived. There was a witness to the murder, but for certain

reasons the charge of the crime was never preferred against you."

"A good reason why. Money had I—you had none. The witness to the murder liked money, and refused to scorn it!" Carlyle sneered.

"You are right. But you forget that the witness still exists, in this very place—and *now* I have the key to unlock a gold mine that will purchase her evidence!"

"You lie!"

"I do not."

"Ha! I suspect something!"

"You may well. The key that unlocks the gold mine also furnishes evidence that will cause some further family disturbance."

"Then it is you who have the iron box of White Eagle, and the child of my daughter's union with him?"

"I decline to answer. I'll let ye know one o' these days, tho'. I've money enough at my command to convict you, however, and the sooner ye prepare yer neck fer the hangman's noose, the quieter will you pass in your checks."

Then the old borderman turned and left the room, and also left David Carlyle in a very unenviable frame of mind. His face grew white and his eyes emitted a venomous gleam.

"Exposure and ruin stare me in the face, unless something is done to avert the impending spite of this old rascal!" he muttered, pacing the floor with nervous strides. "He is as determined as a wolf in his revenge, and will fight to the bitter end to secure a victory. What a sensation there would be in Washington society, were I to be arraigned for murder! But that must not be thought of. Several things must be done, and then a stealthy flight must be made to other parts. First of all, I must pay a visit to Clennie Dupree. She must serve me, or I'll—"

He did not finish the sentence.

Putting a revolver in his pocket, he left the hotel and made his way to the shanty occupied by the woman whom the reader has known as the "Doctor."

In answer to his rap she opened the door, and, without waiting for an invitation, he entered.

She uttered a startled cry at sight of him, and closed the door.

"You seem astonished, Clennie," he said, taking a seat. "Were you not aware of my presence in Fairy Flats?"

"Certainly—but I didn't know that you knew I was here!"

"But you perceive I keep myself posted," he smiled. "Not having seen you since I sent you West, I thought I'd call around. How is it that you did not succeed in doing for White Eagle?"

"Who is to say but what I did succeed? Neither you nor I!" she said.

"Bah! I don't believe you killed him at all. But let that drop. I have another job for you"

"I do not want it."

"But I know better. There is a heap of money in it."

"Pooh! I do not need money. I have managed to scrape together enough to keep me comfortable as long as I live."

"Humph! you are mighty independent—alto-

gether too much so, considering your past record. Why are you here in Fairy Flats?"

"For a kindred purpose to your own; I am seeking for White Eagle's child, and the iron box which contains the papers, and the secret of the buried golden treasure."

"Seeking in vain. Did you propose, in case of finding the child, to use it in extorting money from us?"

"Very likely I might do something of the sort," the young woman replied, with a wicked smile. "I am not above speculation."

"Well, then, you can do no better than make terms with me. Listen. Do you remember Abner Holliday, of New Orleans?"

Clennie nodded.

"I have seen him here, calling himself Old Tree-Toad," she said.

"Exactly. Well, the old devil proposes to arrest me for that scrape in New Orleans, and he says he knows where to lay his hand on a sufficient sum of money to buy in your evidence as witness to the crime, first. It happens, however, that I do not propose to have him do anything of the kind; so here I am to make terms with you to put a quietus to his existence."

"You cannot hire me."

"But, I will."

"Your bank account is not strong enough. The last check you ever gave me was no good."

"But, you forget that I have recently got a large English inheritance! I am now rich!"

"Your word is not always good. If you want your enemy killed, why don't you do the job yourself?"

"Because I prefer to have such matters clear of my hands. What will hire you to put the old devil out of the way?"

"In the way of money, nothing short of ten thousand dollars could tempt me."

"Furies! Are you mad?"

"No—perfectly sane."

"But you know I would never pay such a sum—neither would Holliday."

"Well, I've another offer. Marry me, and I'll see to it that the man never troubles you."

"What! I marry you?"

"Even so; that is your only choice. If you refuse, I'll engage with your enemy, and be happy to attend the matinee that sees you ushered out of this world, at the end of a hangman's noose!"

David Carlyle left the shanty, awhile afterward, his countenance glowing with exultation, showing that he had arrived at some satisfactory bargain with the "Doctor."

From her habitation, he paid a visit to Isaacs, the Jew, who was as usual whiling away his leisure in company with some choice old Burgundy.

"Isaacs," the plotter said, flipping a twenty-dollar gold-piece into the lawyer's lap, "I want you to help me, to-night, when all's quiet."

"Vat do?" the Jew demanded.

"You know the girl 't was buried?"

"Yes. Vot off dot?"

"Well, I want to search her coffin. The clew to the lost iron box I believe to be buried in her box!"

"Shimminy gracious! vas dot so?"

"Yes. Will you help me?"

"I can't. I vas got to Shanghai. I'll find a trusty shap to helb you, though, und send him around. Vil dot do?"

"Well, I suppose so. I'll be ready, at the grave at three o'clock."

That night after the moon had gone down and darkness reigned over Fairy Flats, two men stood at the grave of Keno Kate.

One was David Carlyle; the other was a brutal-looking ruffian, armed with a shovel.

"To work, now," the Washingtonian ordered, "for I want to get through with this job before it is time for any one to be abroad. Don't be afraid; I'll pay you well."

The man took a swig from a pocket-flask as a "bracer," and then set to work at digging up the dead.

It was not long ere he had the rough box uncovered and ropes fixed around it.

He then got out of the grave, and with Carlyle's assistance, pulled the box up and out upon the ground.

"Open it," Carlyle said, shivering.

The ruffian produced a screw-driver, and set to work, but before he could accomplish his task, Carlyle uttered an awful oath, and seized his arm.

"For Heaven's sake, look yonder!" he cried.

He pointed to a higher knoll a dozen yards away.

Upon this knoll, wrapt in a flowing robe of white, stood—

Sierra Sam!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPECTRAL SAM'L.

HAD the earth opened at their feet to swallow them, the two grave-robbers could not have been more astounded and horrified.

There stood Sierra Sam, just as he had appeared on his first coming to Fairy Flats, except that his form was now wrapt in the spectral white sheet.

His face looked just the same, with its cool, dauntless expression, its graceful mustache and gleaming eyes, and his slouched sombrero was cocked back upon his head just as natural as ever.

It chanced that McBride, the man who had been sent to assist Carlyle in his heinous work, had been one of those concerned in the burning of the shanty—hence his double terror when he beheld the apparition of the man who was supposed to have perished in the flames.

"Och! howly Moses, it's the speerit av the mon that burned up," he roared, and dropping his shovel, made tracks toward the town.

"Curse me, what does it mean?" David Carlyle muttered, white and trembling. "Can it be that the dead return to life?"

He was half-inclined to stand his ground, as he hated to give up his scheme of searching the coffin.

But when he heard a sepulchral sort of laugh, and saw Sierra Sam gliding down toward him, he hesitated no longer.

With a howl of terror he turned and fled back toward the town, expecting every minute to feel a clammy hand seize hold of him.

But after reaching the edge of the village, he heard no pursuit, and paused to look back.

The apparition had followed him only to the grave, where its shadowy outlines could now be seen.

"The fools have been cheated! Sierra Sam was not burned in that fire at all!" the prince plotter growled, making his way to the hotel, "but is now skylarking about as a ghost! I fear that sleuth-hound more than all else. Something warns me that he will yet make me trouble, ere I get out of this town."

In the mean time the spook reached the coffin of Keno Kate, and stood glaring after the fleeing Washingtonian.

If a ghost, he was a very substantial one, and the triumphant chuckle that escaped him, as he saw the grave-robber disappear from view, was far more natural than ghostly.

"Ha! ha! I nearly paralyzed them with this masquerade!" Sam said finally, laying aside the white sheet. "It was a rather lucky thing for me that I was supposed to be in the shanty when it was burned. The man who burned must have been the Easterner, George Gerald."

Picking up the screw-driver that McBride had left behind, he began finishing the job of opening the coffin.

"This is rather an uncanny job, but I've as much curiosity to know if any clew was buried with Keno Kate as had Carlyle," he mused. "I ought not to shrink from contact with the dead when in the disguise of Black Jack, I watched the poor girl's life leave her body."

"Evident it is, to me, that she and Old Tree-Toad were the ones who relieved me of the iron box and the child several years ago; and it is even more evident that the secret now remains with Tree-Toad concerning the whereabouts of these missing links."

He soon had the rough box up and the coffin-lid off, and the corpse lay revealed in its last resting-place.

Poor Kate looked very peaceful—more as if she were sleeping the sleep of the living than the sleep of the dead.

A careful search of the coffin did Sierra Sam make, and he was not unsuccessful.

In under the pillow upon which the head of Keno Kate rested, was the identical iron box that Sam had received from White Eagle that night in McGurdy's ranch, up in the hills, and which had afterward been stolen from him.

With a cry of exultation Sam removed the prize, and then carefully closed up both coffin and box.

As it was impossible for him to lower the corpse into the grave without assistance, he concluded to let it remain in its present position until morning, when some one would discover it and re-inter it.

The next morning the discovery of the disturbance of Keno Kate's grave became generally known, and created a deal of consternation and excitement, inasmuch as bloody footprints were found in the vicinity of the place.

An inquiry was made for Old Tree-Toad in order that he might be informed of the fact, but no one seemed to know anything about him.

So the body was buried again by Johnson and some of the miners.

The day passed along toward a close without any discovery concerning the old scout, until just at the edge of evening.

Black Jack approached Johnson and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Anything new consarnin' Tree-Toad?" he asked.

"Nary," the "mayor" replied, regarding the man with a huge black beard rather inquiringly.

"Why—d'ye know anything?"

"Waal, no," Jack replied; "but I've got rather an idea that the old man's met wi' foul play."

"Pooh! more likes he's gone off a-huntin'."

"Don't believe it. I've got a notion that I kin show you whar he is. Thar's a female in this town who's up to cuttin' throats, an' I allow it won't do no harm to investigate her shebang. So, ef ye'll come along wi' a dozen fellers, we'll know the worst."

Johnson thought the matter over and finally agreed, and, accompanied by several miners, he and Black Jack made a descent upon Clennie's shanty.

A rap upon the door failed to elicit any answer—except a groan.

"D'ye heer that? I told ye thar was foul play. Down with that door, boyees!"

An attack was made upon it, and quickly it fell in with a crash.

Black Jack's suspicions were indeed confirmed. Upon the floor, in a pool of blood, lay Old Tree-Toad, just alive, and that was about all.

He was at once lifted to the cot-bed, and stimulants administered, after which the shanty was cleared of all, except Black Jack and Johnson, who agreed to remain with the stricken man over night.

His wound was a deep cut in the region of the heart, which did not now bleed externally.

After awhile, he was strong enough to speak, and regarded Black Jack inquiringly.

"I am glad you have come," he said, faintly. Then, turning to Johnson, he added: "Do you know this man?"

"Yes, as Black Jack," Johnson replied.

"Humph! you are easier fooled than I. He is Sierra Sam."

Johnson uttered an ejaculation of astonishment.

"Is this true?" he demanded, turning to Jack.

"Yes, it is true," was the reply. "I am Sierra Sam, the detective. Do you care to examine my authority?"

Johnson took some papers that were extended him, and gave them a careful examination; then, returned them.

"I see that you are, in truth, a detective; and had we, as a people, known this from the start, it would have saved you a deal of trouble. As it is, I shall now take pleasure in workin' fer yer interests."

"You need not, for my mission is pretty nearly through, here."

"You have found the child?" Old Tree-Toad gasped.

"No. I have found the box, however, where you buried it."

"It is well. Had my life been spared, I proposed to keep the child and her fortune, for she is very dear to me," the old man murmured. "But, since I cannot live, I am glad you want to assume the charge, to keep her away from David Carlyle."

"You may be sure I should not yield the object of my long search to him," Sam averred. "But, tell us, how did you receive your wound?"

"From the woman, Clennie. She was, years ago, a witness to David Carlyle's murder of my sister, whom he had married and deserted. I came here, hoping to be able to buy in her evidence, so that I could successfully prosecute Carlyle; but, as ye see, I got left clear out in the cold; jest whar ye see me now."

"Carlyle had been hyar ahead o' me, she said, an' hired her to kill me—I remember hearin' her say this, arter she had suddenly stabbed me, an' I fell. After that I disrecollect what happened. I guess I'm booked to die, an' so, Sam, ef ye'll feel in my pocket, ye'll find a paper thet'll tell ye whar to find the gal o' White Eagle's, whom I cribbed from you one night on the perairies. She knows how to open the box, an' in it ye'll find directions where to find White Eagle's buried gold."

The old man did not say much more after that except that Keno Kate was his sister's child, resulting from her union with David Carlyle. About nine o'clock in the evening he began to choke up rapidly, inside, and soon after breathed his last. Then Johnson called in another man, to watch until morning with the dead, after which he and Sierra Sam (in his disguise of Black Jack) left the shanty.

The latter went to the hotel, where he had been boarding lately, and packed up his valise, as if for an early departure.

The room of Bayard Lynn adjoined that occupied by the Californian.

The rooms of the Carlyles were further down the hall.

During the night, Sam heard a loud yell of pain, that apparently proceeded from Lynn's room.

"Murder!" was the thought that flashed into the detective's mind, and leaping out of bed, he hastily put on his clothes, preparatory to investigating the sounds.

As he stepped from his own room into the hall, Gregory, the hotel proprietor, Moses Isaacs and several others, who had heard the yell, came rushing up.

"Hello! Where was that yell?" Gregory demanded. "Did you hear it?"

"Yes; it was in Lynn's room!" Sam replied. "Let some one keep an eye on the Carlyles' doors, while we investigate."

Isaacs instantly volunteered, and Sierra Sam tried Lynn's door.

It was found to be unlocked, and, opening it, Sam, Gregory and several others entered.

The sight that met their gaze was no less than what the Californian had anticipated.

Upon the bed, in his night clothes, lay Bayard Lynn, unconscious from a knife-wound in his breast, which still bled freely.

"Murder has been done!" Sierra Sam said, "and this man is dying. Quick! bring some cotton, whisky, and salt! He must be revived, if possible, to explain who murdered him."

The things desired were quickly brought, and removing the knife, Sam applied the salt and cotton to in some measure stanch the flow of blood, at the same time directing the others to bathe the victim's feet and head liberally with whisky, and to force some of the same down him.

During this work, both David Carlyle and his daughter came into the room.

At Sam's order, they were quickly seized and bound beyond possibility of escape, Mrs. Lynn bursting into a hysterical fit of weeping.

"In the name of Heaven, what does this mean?" David Carlyle demanded, growing white with passion.

"It means that we are trying to arrive at an explanation of this murder!" Sam replied. "As you are suspected of the crime, we shall try and revive Mr. Lynn, so that we may learn whether or not our suspicions are right. If right, you will very likely find out that you struck the wrong climate when you came to Fairy Flats!"

"Who are you?" Carlyle demanded, a suspicion of the truth dawning upon him.

"Sierra Sam, dead-certain detective!" was the reply, as Sam threw off his disguise.

"Curses upon you!" was all the baffled villain could say, while Clio uttered sob after sob.

The job of bringing Bayard Lynn back to life so that he could speak, promised no immediate success. Although his heart still beat faintly, he was apparently about as near to death as a man could well be without being dead, and their persistent efforts were without any desired result for a time.

David Carlyle watched with so much eagerness as to nearly betray his real hopes.

Finally Sierra Sam said:

"I know of but one other possible chance for arousing him—that is by a sudden shock. If that fails, he will die soon."

He took a six-shot revolver from his belt, and cocking it, fired it off in close proximity to Lynn's right ear.

The loud report caused him to give a violent start, and his eyes flew open.

Sam at once raised him to a sitting posture.

"Quick!" he cried; "tell me who stabbed you!"

Lynn's eyes wandered over the faces of all, till they came to Carlyle; then he gasped, faintly:

"It was he—Carlyle; they are both guilty—my will is made to her—oh!"

A great flow of blood burst from his mouth, choking off further utterance.

When Sam laid him back upon the pillow his spirit had taken its flight to that bourne whither many go, but return not.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE Carlyles were immediately removed to the same jail building that had once served Sierra Sam as a place of confinement.

Stronger evidence of their guilt the citizens of Fairy Flats did not ask for than the dying words of Bayard Lynn.

Immediately after Lynn's death Sierra Sam went down into the office of the Cosmopolitan and seated himself. He half expected, now that his identity was established beyond a doubt, and that an assault would be made upon him.

At one time he thought the expected crisis was coming, when a dozen sturdy miners, armed to the teeth, entered the office and approached him.

Johnson, at the head of the gang, was the first to speak—he said:

"Sierra Sam, it needs no practiced eye to apprise us that, though very calm in demeanor, you are prepared for us. But that is not our lay-out to-night. In the arrest of the murderers to-night, we have more than assurance of your object in coming here to Fairy Flats, and as the representative citizens, chosen by the people at large, we come to apologize to you for our hasty action, prior to the events of this day, and to offer you, henceforth, the welcome freedom and good-will of Fairy Flats and its people. But, with the same offering, we wish to make one request."

"Name it?" Sam said, lighting a cigar.

"Our request is that you withdraw all official charges from the prisoners now in jail, for the space of an hour?"

Sierra Sam's answer came quick and decisive:

"Gentlemen, I am not disposed to do anything of the kind."

"Then we, by pre-considered vote, must find it agreeable to take the law into our own hands, and hold you in a state of quiet until our ends are fulfilled!" Johnson cried, springing forward followed by those who had accompanied him.

In an instant he was overpowered and securely bound.

A consultation was then held, by which it was decided to hold Sam a prisoner in his own room for a time, and there he was taken and guarded by a trio of well-armed miners.

He heard the crowd leave the room below, and still later a loud chorus of voices crying, "Heave ho!"

He needed nothing more to convince him that the citizens had taken the law into their own hands and hung David Carlyle and his wretched, scheming daughter!

The next morning a body of citizens visited Sierra Sam's room and marched him from there to the jail, where he was locked in.

Johnson soon after paid him a visit, his face bearing signs of trouble.

"Why is it I am not released?" Sam demanded, sternly.

"If I had my way," the mayor replied, "you'd go free, but the majority's ag'in me. But don't worry. Ef ye git a chance to escape to-night don't ye refuse it."

"I'll not, you may rest assured."

Johnson then took his leave.

During the dead of that night the door of the jail was unlocked, and Moses Isaacs and the child Little Luck made their appearance.

"Vel, here we vas, all der vile," the Jew said, with a smile. "You haff been a purty good fellow, Sam, and I haff come to helb you oud.

As you probably haff no furder pizness heer, I dinks you'll take my advice und skip for odder parts."

"You bet!" Sam responded, heartily, with a grimace. "With the death of the Carlyles and Old Tree-Toad my mission hereabouts ends. You have received your pay, eh?"

"Yaw! dot ish all right. I hope you my get paid ash well. Und you shall. You vas a fine fellow, Sierra Sam."

"Pooh! there are but few of your way of thinking," Sam replied. "Why is this child here with you?"

"She was left by the woman Clennie, and has no home or friends. She came to me, and so I took her in until I could find a better guardian for her."

The Jew had suddenly dropped his native dialect—a fact Sierra noted, as he looked at him keenly.

"How would you like to join fortunes with me, Little Luck?" he asked, turning toward the girl, "and rove about the world, here and there and all over?"

"I would like that," Little Luck replied. "Mamma was very cruel; she run off and left me. Henceforth I cut her acquaintance!"

The declaration was given with so much soberness and earnest womanliness, that both Isaacs and Sam were forced to laugh.

"Well, if you want to go with me, all right. Perhaps in this way I can in time fix you up a home with some good family. And now, Isaacs, if you'll cut my bonds I'll bid this place good-by."

Little Luck sprung forward and did the job with her own knife.

"Der vas no need to pe in von hurry," Isaacs assured, with a chuckle. "Der guards are all ashleeb mit drugged visky, und won't vake up righd away. Und den, too, I vas goin' along mit you for a vays."

"You are?"

"Vel, I should snicker—dot is, if you haff no objections. I vant to see White Eagle's shild, und also the buried treasure."

Sam again eyed the man narrowly, hardly understanding him.

"See here, Isaacs!" he said, directly, "d'ye know I don't believe you are what you pretend. A bit ago I caught you talking in unbroken English—now you're playing off Dutch again. Ten to one there's no Dutch about you."

"Well, you are right. I have played my disguise well, but you have suspicioned it, so there is little use for me to keep up the deception any longer. Do you know me?"

He threw off his cap, spectacles and false mustache and rubbed some paint from his cheeks and nose, and stood before Sierra Sam in his true character.

And Sam did know him!

"White Eagle, as I live!" he ejaculated, his surprise knowing no bounds. "By all that's wonderful I never expected such a transformation although I've never quite believed you dead."

"Then you didn't suppose I was capable of assuming disguises, eh? Well, I must admit my Jew dodge has served me very well."

"And since this is you, you must have the

power to explain some things which yet remain in the dark."

"You refer to the Bloody Boots mystery, eh? Well, as we walk away from here, I'll endeavor to explain to your satisfaction."

They then left the jail, and quitted Fairy Flats for good. When beyond the town, on their way into the mountains, White Eagle said:

"Well, that night, after you left the McGurdys' Ranch, with my child in your care, I made a resolve that if I had to die, it should not be in that hole; so I summoned all my strength, and managed to draw myself through a window out into the storm, and escape. After months of suffering in a mountain pocket, I grew strong and well. I then came to Fairy Flats, and discovered the gold here; but also made the discovery that a couple of miners had made their pile here, and were just ready to levant and spread the news. So I made a bargain with them to swear that when they left no rock was on the Flats—that some miraculous agency had placed it there in their absence. Hoping to scare off others, I chiseled the words upon the rock, adding your name, thinking you might come to the place, see your name, and by it know that I lived. I never thought it would get you into trouble."

"Well, the influx came, and Fairy Flats grew up. I assumed the disguise of Isaacs, and became a citizen—not because I purposed to permanently remain so, but because by arrangement with my spies, I learned that the Carlyles were coming here. It was my intention to fight them to the bitter end, but then you came, and so I remained more quiet, and enjoyed myself in noting how faithfully you were working to keep your promise to me. I soon conceived the idea of the bloody boots, and procuring a quantity of crimson liquid, got up a pair of boots on a scientific plan, by which, at will, I could leave a blood-colored footprint."

"By careful and painstaking dodging, I was able to get my work in to the mystification of all, though occasionally it cost me trouble and run me into great danger. So that, I guess, explains all. By the way, you have the iron safe and the knowledge of where my daughter can be found?"

"You bet! The safe is buried not far away. After getting it, we will go for the child."

Two days later they visited an old mountain hut, miles from Fairy Flats, and there recovered little Idyl Imbrie from an old trapper and his family, with whom Old Tree-Toad had some time previously intrusted her.

To them White Eagle gave a bag of gold for their care of his child, which not only hugely pleased the old pair, but whose value was also sufficient to keep them nicely in their humble circumstances for the remainder of their lives.

Sierra Sam, White Eagle, and the two girls set out, eastward, *en route* for some more civilized portion of the great West; but while riding through the canyon, they were suddenly charged down upon by a band of six masked road-agents.

None of the assailants' bullets proving fatal, Sam and White Eagle returned fire, and dropped two of the party.

The other four at once wheeled their horses and sped away, and succeeded in escaping.

An examination of the two "halted" outlaws resulted in a discovery. Upon tearing the mask from one who was still alive, the face of the woman, Clennie Dupree, was revealed!

"It's all up with me," she gasped. "I've played the last card of my pack in hoping to get possession of White Eagle's wealth. Let me die in peace."

"First tell me who are the parents of Little Luck?" Sam solicited.

"I am the mother; the father was the gambler, Idaho, who left me to shift for myself. It was I who betrayed the cabin, and it was George Gerald who perished instead of you."

She never spoke again, expiring almost before her revelation was disjointedly made.

In respect for Little Luck, she was given a decent burial, near where she had fallen.

A few days after, at their friendly parting, White Eagle presented Sierra Sam and Little Luck each an order for gold to a large amount on a St. Louis banker.

Accompanied by Little Luck, Sierra Sam went to St. Louis to report himself, but soon returned to the wild West.

THE END.

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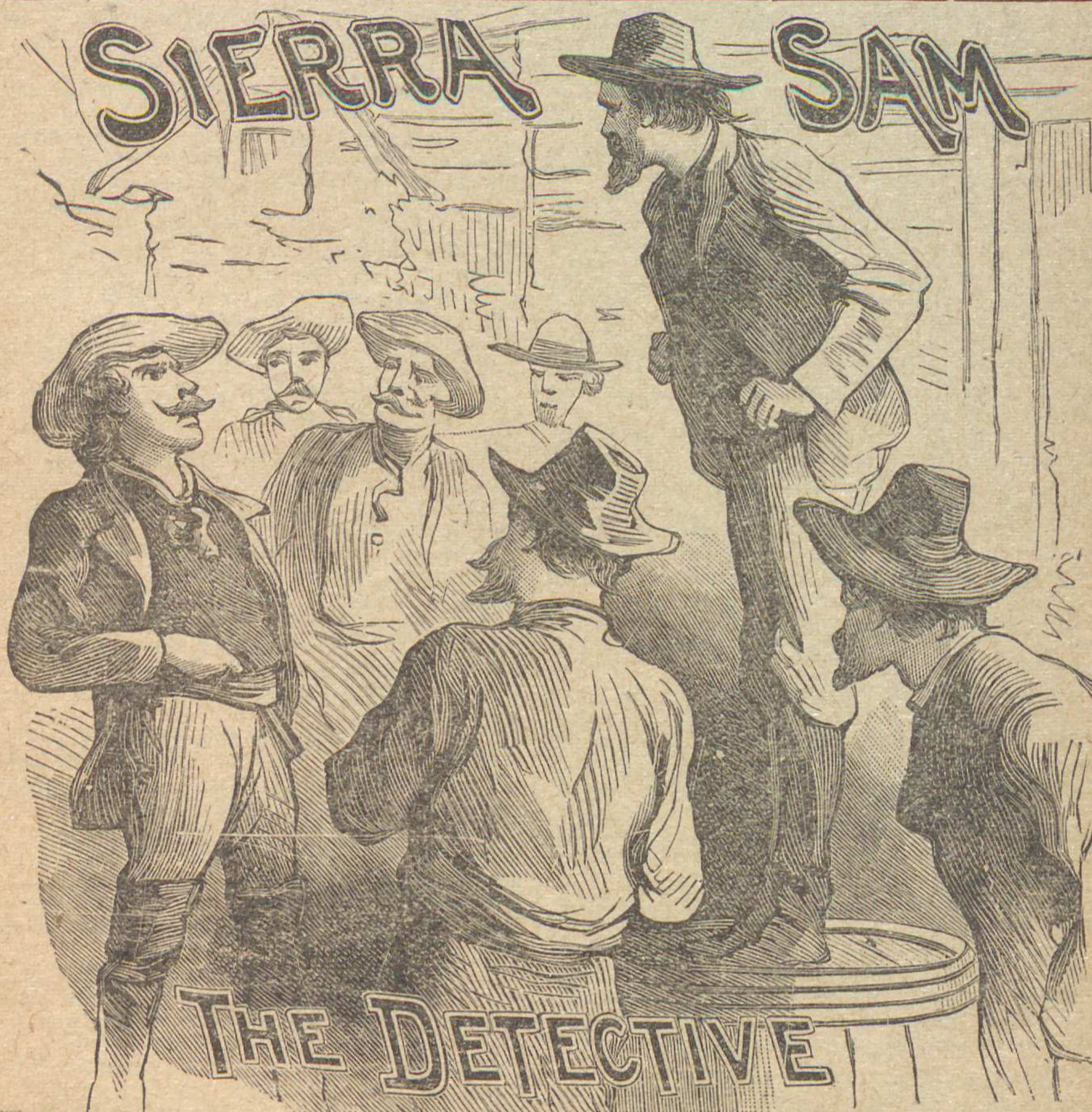
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